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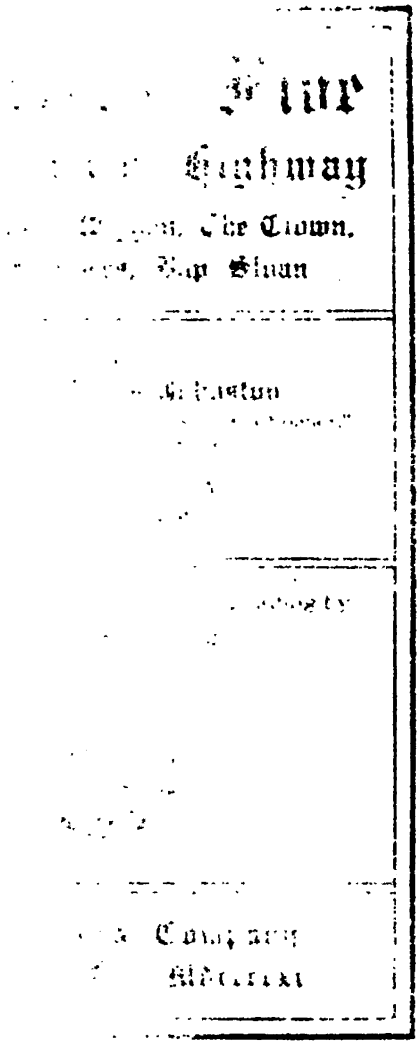

Travelers Five

Along Life's Highway

Jimmy, Gideon Wiggan, The Clown, Wexley Snathers, Bap. Sloan

BY

Annie (Fellows) Johnston

Author of "The Little Colonel Series," "Asa Holmes," "Joel: A Boy of Galilee," etc.

With a Foreword by

Bliss Carman

Frontispiece in full colour from a painting by

Edmund H. Garrett

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Foreword

Of all the elements that go to make up a good story, — plot, verisimilitude, happy incident, local colour, excellent style, — none perhaps is more important than the touch of understanding sympathy. The writer must not only see his characters clearly and draw them with a masterly hand; he must have the largeness of heart that can share in all the turbulent experience of the human spirit. His people must be set against the vast shifting background of destiny. He must show their dramatic relations, one to another, and the influence of life upon life; he must also show their profounder, more

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moving and mysterious, relations to fate and time and the infinite things.

The writer of fiction creates for us a mimic country, peoples it with creatures of the fancy, like ourselves and yet different, and asks us to stray for our entertainment through that new kingdom. The scenes may be as strange or as familiar as you please; the characters as commonplace or as exceptional as you will; yet they must always be within the range of our sympathy. The incidents must be such as we ourselves could pass through; the people must be such as we can understand. They may well be exceptional, for that enlists our interest and enlivens our curiosity; they must not be beyond our comprehension nor outside our spiritual pale, for then we could have no sympathy with them, and our hearts would only grow cold as we read.

And what is at the base of our sym-

pathy and interest? Nothing but our common life. They, too, — all the glad or sorrowing children of imaginative literature from Helen of Troy to Helena Richie — are travelers like ourselves on the great highway. We know well how difficult a road it is, how rough, how steep, how dangerous, how boggy, how lined with pitfalls, how bordered with gardens of deadly delights, how beset by bandits, how noisy with fakirs, how overhung with poisonous fruit and swept by devastating storms. We know also what stretches of happiness are there, what days of friendship, what hours of love, what sane enjoyment, what rapturous content.

How should we not, then, be interested in all that goes by upon that great road? We like to sit at our comfortable windows, when the fire is alight or the summer air is soft, and "watch the pass," as

they say in Nantucket, — what our neighbours are about, and what strangers are in town. If we live in a small community, there is the monotony of our daily routine to be relieved. When an unknown figure passes down the street, we may enjoy the harmless excitement of novelty and taste something of the keen savour of adventure. If we are dwellers in a great city, where every passer is unknown, there is still the discoverer's zest in larger measure; every moment is great with possibility; every face in the throng holds its secret; every figure is eloquent of human drama. The pageant is endless, its story never finished. Who, indeed, could not be spellbound, beholding that countless changing tatterdemalion caravan go by? Yet all we may hope for of the inner history of these journeying beings, so humanly amazing, so significant, and all moved like our-

selves by springs of joy and fear, hope and discouragement, is a glimpse here and there, a life-story revealed in a single gesture, a tragic history betrayed in the tone of a voice or the lifting of a hand, or perhaps a heaven of gladness in a glancing smile. For the most part their orbits are as aloof from us as the courses of the stars, potent and mystic manifestations of the divine, glowing puppets of the eternal masked in a veil of flesh.

This was the pomp of history which held the mind of Shakespeare, of Dickens, of Cervantes, of Balzac, in thrall, and drew the inquiring eye of Browning and Whitman, of Stevenson and Borrow, with so charmed and comprehending a look. To understand and set down faithfully some small portion of the tale of this ever changing procession, which is for ever appearing over the sunrise hills of to-morrow and passing

into the twilight valleys of yesterday, is the engrossing task of the novelist and the teller of tales.

How well that task is accomplished, is the measure of the story-teller's power. He may pick his characters from homely types that we know, and please us with the familiar; or he may paint for us some portion of the great pageant that has never passed our door, and raise us with the mystery of unaccustomed things. In either case he will touch our hearts by revealing the hidden springs of action in his chosen men and women. He will enlarge the borders of our mental vision and illumine our appreciation by his greater insight, greater knowledge, finer reasoning. In his magic mirror we shall not only see more of life than we saw before, but we shall see it more clearly, more penetratingly, more wonderfully. And ever afterwards, as we look on the

world we know, life which perhaps used to seem to us so commonplace, and events which used to seem such a matter of course, will take on a significance, a dignity, a glamour, which they never before possessed, — or, to speak more truly, which they always possessed, indeed, but which we had not the power to see. This is the great educative use of creative literature; it teaches us to look on the world with more understanding, to confront it in manlier fashion, to appreciate the priceless gift of life more widely and generously, and so to live more fully and efficiently and happily.

The great opportunity of literature, then, and its great responsibility, are evident. As Matthew Arnold put it, "The future of poetry is immense." In an age when men and women are coming more and more to do their own thinking and form their own ethical judgments,

the power and moral obligation of letters must tend to increase rather than to diminish. It is an encouraging sign of the times and of growing intelligence, that we demand a greater veracity in our stories, and like writers who find significance and charm in common surroundings. Our genuine appreciation has produced a very real national literature, great in amount and often reaching true eminence and distinction in quality. Books like Miss Alice Brown's "Meadow Grass" and "Country Neighbours" are at once truly native and full of the dignity and poetry and humour of life. At their best they reveal depths of human feeling and experience with a telling insight and sympathy, and with a felicity of style, which belong only to masterpieces of fiction.

To this charming province in the wide domain of letters "Travelers Five" be-

longs, and Mrs. Annie Fellows Johnston's many admirers must congratulate themselves on its appearance, as they stir the fire of an autumn afternoon. Here once more we may sit as at a pleasant window and "watch the pass" on the great highway. Here you shall see approaching, in that delightful and motley cavalcade, Irish Jimmy in his ranchman's dress, his warm Celtic heart urging him on up the obscure trail of unselfish good; here, grotesque old Gid Wiggan, flouting the shows of fashion, yet himself a showman conspicuous in the greater show of life; here, the old story, a fine gentleman's sense and feeling masquerading under the antics of a traveling clown; next, an embarrassed villager with something like greatness thrust upon him; and last, another strange example of silent persistent New England idealism, too proud to confess itself

and only reaching its goal through a lifetime of repression and apparent failure.

But I am obstructing your view while I prate! Forgive me. I will step aside and let you have the window to yourself, so that you may quietly observe these Travelers going by.

New Canaan, Conn.,
26 September, 1911.

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The First Traveler

Jimmy.

On the Trail of the Wise Men

Travelers Five
Along Life's Highway

The First Traveler

Jimmy
On the Trail of the Wise Men

ORDINARILY a fleck of cigar ashes in the pot of mashed potatoes would not have caused a row in the ranch kitchen, but to-day old Jimmy had had a sup too much. At such times the mere sight of Matsu, the Japanese cook, could provoke him to oaths, and it was Matsu who had unwittingly dropped the ashes into the pot, as he laid his cigar stump on the shelf above the stove, preparatory to dishing up dinner.

Time was when Jimmy had been the

cook at Welsh's ranch, and had had it all his own way in the greasy adobe kitchen. But that was before Ben Welsh's last round-up. Since then his widow had been obliged to turn part of the cattle-ranch into a boarding camp for invalids; the part that lay in a narrow strip along the desert. Health-seekers paid better than cattle or alfalfa she found.

Many things came in with the new administration. Matsu was one of them, in his white chef's cap and jacket. The spotless linen was a delight to the boarders, but to Jimmy, deposed to the rank of hewer of wood and drawer of water, it was the badge of the usurper. Naturally enough his jealousy took the form of making Matsu live up to his linen, and he watched him like a cat for the slightest lapse from cleanliness.

This constant warfare with Matsu was one of the few diversions the camp af-

forded, and every man made much of it. Had he been let alone, old Jimmy would have accepted the situation as merely one more ill-turn of Fate, which had left him as usual at the bottom of the wheel. But his futile resentment was too funny a thing for his tormentors to allow to die out.

It was a remark made early that morning which set him to brooding over his wrongs, and finally led to the sup too much which precipitated the fight over the potato-pot. Batty Carson made it, in a hoarse whisper, all the voice left to him since the grippe sent him West in his senior year. (He had been the best tenor in his college glee-club.) Jimmy was moving a table into the shadow of the tents, in order that the daily game of poker might begin. Poker was all there was in that God-forsaken desert to save a man's reason, Batty declared, so they

played it from breakfast till bed-time. As the usual group joined him around the table, he opened a new deck of cards and began shuffling it. Automatically he found the joker and flipped it out of the pack. It fell face up on the dry Bermuda grass and old Jimmy stooped to pick it up.

Batty stopped him with a laugh. "A seasoned old poker player like you stooping to pick up the joker!" he teased. "You know well enough only one game goes on this ranch, and the joker's no good in *that*." Then he winked at the others.

"That's what you'll be after awhile, Jimmy, if you don't stand up for your rights better than you are doing. Matsu will be taking every trick in the game, and you'll count for nothing more than just the joker of the pack."

Jimmy flared up with an indignant

oath at the laugh which followed, tore the card in two, and would have gone off muttering vengeance on Batty himself, had not the young fellow stopped him and teased him back into good humour. But the remark rankled afterward because there was such a large element of truth in it. Jimmy was no fool even if he was slow-witted. He knew as well as any one else that he had never counted for much in any game Life had ever given him a hand in. He brooded over the fact until some sort of solace was necessary. After that he burned for an occasion to assert himself. It came when Mrs. Welsh called to him to fill the wood-box. Just as he threw down his first armful of mesquite, the accident befell the potatoes, and he waited to see what Matsu would do.

What could Matsu do with sixteen hungry men listening for the dinner bell,

but scoop out a big spoonful from the side of the pot where the ashes had fallen, toss it out of the window and heap the rest of the white fluffy mass into the hot dish awaiting it? Jimmy would have done the same in his day but now he thundered, "Throw out the whole potful, you pig of a heathen! Do you want to drive away every boarder on the ranch with your dirty tricks? Throw it out, I say."

With the good-nature that rarely failed him, Matsu only shrugged his shoulders, giggled his habitual giggle and proceeded, unmoved by threats.

"Go get 'notha drink," he advised, as Jimmy continued to glare at him. "Make you have heap much betta feeling. Not so big mad. Go get full."

Dinner was twenty minutes late that day. The boarders heard the reason from Hillis, who came in in his shirt sleeves to wait on the table, in place of Mrs.

Welsh. Hillis was the dish-washer, a tall big-fisted lumberman from Maine, who, stranded at the close of an ill-starred prospecting tour, had taken temporary service in Mrs. Welsh's kitchen. He talked cheerfully of the disturbance as he clumped around the table, thrusting the dishes at each boarder in turn. They forgave his awkwardness in their interest in the fight.

"Jimmy began it," he told them. "Swung on to the pot and tried to pull it away from Jappy and throw out the stuff himself. But Jappy wouldn't have it, and batted him one on the head with the potato masher. Then Jimmy went in for blood, and grabbed the meat-knife, and would have put it into him in a pair of seconds if I hadn't tripped him up and sat on him. There was a hot time in there for a spell, the air was blue. Old Jimmy cussin' for all he was worth in

the sand-flapper lingo, and Matsu going him one better every time in his pigeon English!"

"I suppose they'll both throw up their jobs now," remarked a dyspeptic looking man near the foot of the table. "I thought it was too good to last, and this God-forsaken Arizona desert can't hold more than one chef like Matsu. He's the perfection of his kind. I'd feel like hitting the trail myself if he should go."

"That's what Mrs. Welsh is afraid of," replied Hillis. "She's out there now trying to patch up the peace with him and coax him to stay. She told me not to tell you about the potatoes — thought it might turn some of you against your victuals; but it's too blamed funny to keep."

"For my part I hope she'll patch up the peace with Jimmy, too," said Batty

Carson in his hoarse whisper. "He's the only amusing thing in all this howling wilderness. His being so far off the track himself makes it all the funnier when he goes to playing human guide-post for everybody else."

"He'll get his neck wrung a-doing it sometime," rejoined Hillis. "I told him so when he came fussing around at first, sticking his fingers in my dish-water to see if it was hot enough to kill germs. I told him I'd scald him instead of the dishes if he didn't let me alone. But it's just his way I suppose. He's been here off and on ever since Welsh bought the ranch."

"It's off this time," came Batty's croaking whisper. "There he goes now. Whew! He's hot! Just watch him hump himself along!"

The eight men whose backs were toward the window, turned in their chairs

to follow the gaze of the others. They had a glimpse of a tall spare figure, hurrying stiffly past the house as fast as his rheumatic joints would allow. There was anger in every line of it. Even the red bandana around his throat seemed to express it. The fierce curves of his old hat-brim, the bristling hairs of his grizzly mustache, the snap of his lean jaws as the few snags left in his sunken gums opened and shut on a quid of tobacco, all told of an inward rage which would be long in cooling.

"Well, it's all over now," announced Hillis a moment later, coming back from the kitchen with a bowl of hot gravy. "Jimmy vowed one of them had to go, so Mrs. Welsh said he'd have to be that one. She could get a Mexican to chop wood and carry water, but she couldn't get another cook like Matsu. And Jimmy's that mad and insulted and hurt

he can't get off the place fast enough. He's gone now to pack his kit, muttering as if he'd swallowed a lot of distant thunder."

A laugh went around the long table. Usually the meals proceeded in silence except for a few spasmodic outbursts. Sitting all day in the sun, gazing at the monotonous desert landscape while one waits for winter to crawl by, is not a conversational stimulant. But to-day, even Maidlow, the grumpiest invalid in the lot, forgot his temperature and himself in adding his mite to the fund of anecdotes passing around the table about Jimmy. The conversation was less restrained than usual in the absence of the only lady and child which the ranch boasted. The Courtlands were spending the day in Phœnix, so there were three vacant chairs at the foot of the table. One was a child's high-chair with a bib

hanging over its back. Hillis laid his hand on it in passing.

"Here's one that will miss the old rain-crow," he said, as if glad to find some good word about Jimmy. "Little Buddy Courtland comes about as near loving him as anybody could, I guess. *He'll* miss him."

"It's Dane Ward who'll really miss him," declared the dyspeptic, glancing out of the window at the farthest row of tents to the one at the end whose screen door was closed. "Now Jimmy's gone I don't see what that poor fellow will do when he needs some one to sit up with him of nights."

"That's right," agreed Batty Carson. "Jimmy's been his right bower ever since he came. I'll give the old devil credit for that much."

While they talked, Jimmy, outside in the shack which he shared with Hillis,

was gathering up in a furious rage his small bundle of belongings, cursing darkly as he threw boots, shirts and overalls into a confused heap in the middle of his bunk. Near at hand the tents stood empty in the December sun; five rows of them, four in a row with twenty foot spaces between. Each canvas-covered screen door swung open, and outside sat a camp chair or a big wooden rocker, with blanket or overcoat trailing across it, just as its occupant had left it to go in to dinner. A litter of newspapers and magazines lay all around on the dry Bermuda grass.

There was one exception. One screen door was closed, that of the farthest tent on the back row in line with Jimmy's shack. A sound of coughing — choked, convulsive coughing, had been coming from that direction for several minutes, but the sound did not penetrate Jimmy's

consciousness until he heard his name called in an agonized tone. He craned his head out to listen. The call came again in a frantic gasp:

"Jimmy! Jimmy! Oh, *somebody* come!"

Then he recognized the voice. It was Dane Ward calling him. In his row with Matsu he had forgotten the boy; forgotten that he was to carry him his dinner and give him his medicine. He remembered with a pang of self-reproach that he had promised to come back with fresh wood as soon as he had carried an armful of wood to the kitchen. He started off on a stiff jog-trot towards the tent.

A moment later, maybe not even so long as that, for as he ran he knew that he might be racing against death, he dashed into the kitchen which he had sworn never again to enter, and caught

up a handful of salt. Hillis, thinking he had lost his mind, almost dropped the tray of dessert dishes he was holding for Matsu to fill; but Mrs. Welsh recognizing the import of Jimmy's act, followed without question as he called back over his shoulder, "It's Dane! The worst hemorrhage the lad's had yet."

Hillis carried the news into the dining room with the dessert. Big and strong, never having had a sick day in his life, he could not know the effect it would produce, and Mrs. Welsh had not thought to warn him. The room grew silent. It was what might happen to any one of them; had happened in fact to all. The apprehension of it was the skeleton at their every feast. First one man and then another pushed back his plate and went out into the sunshine. They all liked Dane, the shy, quiet boy from some village in the New York hills. That was

all they knew of him, for he always sat apart. Sometimes there was a book in his lap but he rarely read — just sat and gazed off towards the east with a hungry look in his big grey eyes. The homesick longing of them was heart-breaking to see.

They went back to their chairs and their naps and their newspapers, but the usual afternoon monotony was broken by the interest centering in the farthest tent in the last row. They glanced up furtively every time the door opened. It swung many times in the course of the afternoon, for Mrs. Welsh to go in and out, for the doctor to make a hurried visit, for Jimmy to come and go with crushed ice and clean towels, a spoon or a pitcher of fresh water.

For Jimmy, in his anxious ministrations, forgot his fight with Matsu, forgot that he had had no dinner, and that he

was in the midst of preparations for leaving the ranch. The ugly facts did not come back to him till several hours had passed. Then he started up from the chair beside Dane's bed and tip-toed heavily across the floor. He would finish making up his bundle while the boy was asleep. The danger was past now. If he could get down to the Tempe road before dark, probably he could catch a ride the rest of the way into Phœnix. A board creaked and Dane opened his eyes.

"I wasn't asleep," he said weakly. "Hand me that little picture off the bureau, won't you, Jimmy?" Then as his fingers closed over it — "And roll the canvas to the top of the door please. I can't see."

Jimmy sat down again, impelled by the pitifulness of the thin white face. He knew the picture, having examined it

privately on several occasions while sweeping the tent. It was a tin-type of two laughing school-girls, with their arms around each other. It was plain to him that one was Dane's sister. He guessed the relationship of the other when he saw that it was on the face unlike his that Dane's wistful eyes rested longest. Presently he slipped it under his pillow and lay so still that Jimmy thought he was asleep, until he saw a tear slipping slowly from under the closed eye-lids. Involuntarily the rough hand went out and closed in a sympathetic grasp over the white fingers on the coverlet. Dane bit his lip to hide their twitching and then broke out bitterly, but in a voice so weak that it came in gasps:

"That doctor back home lied to me! He *lied!* He knew that I was past saving when he sent me out here. He ought to have told me. Do you suppose I'd

have let my mother mortgage her home — all she had in the world — to send me, if he hadn't led us to believe that the Arizona climate could work a miracle? He made it so certain that I'd get well right away, it seemed suicidal not to take the chance."

He stopped, almost strangled by a paroxysm of coughing, lay panting for a moment, and then began again, despite Jimmy's warning that it would make him worse to talk.

"Mother can never pay out without my help, and I've got to lie here to the end and think of what's in store for her and Sis, and then — *die and be buried out here in this awful desert!* It'll cost too much to be sent back home. Oh, how could a man lie like that to a person that's dying?"

The question staggered Jimmy a moment. He turned his eyes uneasily from

Dane's piercing gaze in order that he might lie cheerfully himself.

"What are you thinking about dying for?" he demanded in his bluff way. "You'll be better than ever after this spell. It sort of cleaned out your pipes you know. You'll be busting bronchos with the best of them by spring if you keep up your courage. Look at Mr. Courtland now. He was worse off than you when he came, a heap sight. Had to be brought on a stretcher. *He's* getting well."

"No, it's different — everyway," answered Dane wearily. "He's got his family with him, and money and — everything. I haven't even my mother's picture. She never had any taken. If I had even that when the end comes it wouldn't seem quite so lonesome. But to think of all strange faces, and afterwards — to lie among strangers hundreds of

miles away from home — oh, it nearly makes me crazy to think of the miles and miles of cactus and sand between us! I hate the sight of this awful country."

Jimmy looked out through the open door of the tent, across the dreary waste of desert, separated from the camp by only the irrigating ditch, and the unfrequented highroad, as if he were seeing it in a new light.

"'Spect it might strike a fellow as sort of the end of nowhere the first time he sees it," he admitted. "I've lived here so long I kind of like it myself. But I know what you're craving to see. I lived back in the hills myself when I was a kid. I was brought up in York state."

Dane raised himself on his elbow, an excited flush on his face. "*You*, from home," he began. "New York — "

Jimmy pushed him back. "You're

getting too frisky," he admonished. "You'll be took again if you ain't careful. Yes, I know just what you're pining for. You want to see the hills all red with squaw berries or pink in arbutus time; and the mountain brooks — nothing like these muddy old irrigating ditches — so clear you can see the pebbles in the bottom, and the trout flipping back and forth so fast you can hardly see their speckles. But Lord! boy — you don't want to go back there now in midwinter. The roads are piled up with drifts to the top of the stone fences and the boughs of the sugar-bush are weighed down with snow till you'd think you was walking through a grove of Christmas trees."

"Oh, go *on!*" pleaded Dane, as he paused. His eyes were closed, but a smile rested on his face as if the scenes Jimmy described were his for the mo-

ment. "Jimmy, it's — it's like heaven to hear you talk about it! Don't stop."

To keep the smile on the white face, that rapt, ineffable smile of content, Jimmy talked on. Over forty years lay between him and the scenes he was recalling. He had wandered far afield from his straight-going, path-keeping Puritan family. He had been glad at times that they had lost track of him, and that wherever he went he was known only as "Jimmy." Gradually the reminiscences like the touch of a familiar hand on a troubled brow, soothed Dane into forgetfulness of his surroundings, and he fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

Just at dusk that evening, when Batty Carson went around to the kitchen for his usual glass of new milk, he was surprised to see Jimmy down by the wood-pile. He was vigorously at work, helping unload a wagon of mesquite, and quite as

vigorously scolding the Indian who had brought it for coming so late.

"Thought he was going to leave," croaked Batty, nodding towards the wood-pile as he took the glass extended towards him.

Hillis chuckled. "Says he's staying on Dane's account; that it would have touched the heart of a coyote the way he begged not to be left to die among strangers. It seems they're both from the same state, so they're almost claiming kin. I rather guess though, that when he'd cooled down he was glad of any old excuse to stay, and when the boy begged him and Mrs. Welsh seconded the motion, he felt he could give in without any let-down to his dignity."

The Indian, gathering up his reins, rattled away in the empty wagon, and Jimmy began to fill his chip-basket, singing in a high, tremulous falsetto as he

worked. His voice had been his pride in his youth. It was still sweet, although it cracked at times on the higher notes —

"Wa-ait for me at heav-un's gate,
Swe-et Belle Mahone!"

Hillis laughed. "Sings as if he fairly feels his wings sprouting. It's a sure sign he's at peace with the world when he trots out those sentimental old tunes. He doesn't sound now much like the man who was in here this noon, cussin' and slashing around with a butcher knife."

But Jimmy had not forgotten. He cooked his own supper that night, first ostentatiously wiping the skillet and everything else that Matsu had touched, with such an expression of disgust on his face that the little Jap's fine sense of humour was tickled. He shrugged his shoulders, giggled his usual jolly giggle,

and afterwards mimicked the whole scene until Mrs. Welsh and Hillis nearly choked with laughter.

Dane was up in a few days, able to go to the dining room and to drive short distances. Young Mrs. Courtland spoke of his improvement to Jimmy one morning as they watched him drive away with Hillis in the ranch surrey. They were going to a neighbouring orange grove to replenish the stock in the storeroom. Jimmy, kneeling in the path, mending Buddy's wooden goat, drove a final tack before he straightened himself to answer.

"No, ma'am!" he said emphatically. "That boy'll never be what is to say really better. When he tears the last leaf off that calendar in his tent he ain't going to need next year's."

Mrs. Courtland looked up, shocked, frightened. "He seems almost as well as

my husband, and *he* is going to get well." She said it defiantly.

"Sure," answered Jimmy. "But he isn't dying of homesickness and worry along with his lung trouble. He's got you and Buddy and the cash. He doesn't have to drive himself nearly crazy thinking that the time is bound to come when those he loves best will be left without a roof over their heads on account of him. It was worse than cruel — it was a downright crime for that doctor to build their hopes up so. If he'd had sense enough to doctor a June-bug he'd have seen that nothing can cure the lad. To send him on such a wild goose chase is bad enough, but to send him alone and as poor as he is — Good Lord — "

Jimmy paused, remembering his audience, just in time to stop the malediction on his tongue.

"But," urged Mrs. Courtland, uncon-

sciously moved to the championship of the unknown doctor by the fact that her father was a physician, "other men have come alone and they seem to be getting on all right."

"Yes, but if you take notice they're all the kind that had bucked up against the world before they got sick, and were used to shifting for themselves. Now there's Batty Carson. *He's* going to get well. He goes about it as if he was training to get on a foot-ball team. So much deep breathing every so often, hot beef juice at nine, raw eggs at ten, fifty licks at the wood-pile at eleven — What with his sun baths and water baths and rubdowns, looking at his thermometer and weighing himself and feeling his pulse and counting his breaths and watching the clock, he ain't got time to miss his folks. Most of the boarders this year happen to be that sort, or else

they've got money to go in for all kinds of amusements that make them forget their troubles. But there was a pitiful lot of cases here last winter. They was too far gone when they come to have any fight in 'em. And that's what I say — it's heartless of the doctors to ship them off here when they've only one chance in a thousand. The West is full of 'em and it ain't right."

Batty Carson, shuffling cards at the little table set in the shade behind the next tent, looked up with a wink when he heard his name mentioned. The others in the game smiled with him as Jimmy went on, and a voice from one of the farther tents called, " Go it, Jimmy! You ought to hire a hall and not waste all that eloquence on a lot of lungers who already vote your ticket. Wish you'd bring me a box of matches when you get around to it."

Taking the tents in order, as was his custom, emptying slops and filling pitchers, Jimmy gradually worked his way along the row until he came to the one outside of which the card-game was going on in silence. As he moved around inside setting things to rights, Batty Carson held up a finger and winked.

"Listen!" he whispered. There was a clinking of bottles on the wash-stand, then a soft plash into the slop-jar, and Jimmy cleared his throat with a muffled "kha-a-a" as if he had just swallowed something good.

"The old buzzard's been at my alcohol bottle again," whispered Batty. "Last time he went against it he didn't leave me enough for one good rub-down, and then he had the face to reel off a long temperance lecture on what a pity it was that so many of us fellows kept spirits in our tents."

A loud laugh followed Jimmy as he walked out innocently clinking his pails. There was a smell of alcohol in his wake. He had spilled some on his clothes. Ignorant of the cause of their mirth he looked back at them over his shoulder with a friendly smile. As he dropped the bucket into the cistern out by the bamboo thicket, his voice floated back in a high cracked falsetto:

"Wa-ait for me at heav-un's gate,
Swe-et Belle Mahone!"

Batty laughed again. "What kind of a bet will you fellows put up on Jimmy's prospect of even getting within gun-shot of heaven's gate?" he asked.

"I never bet on a dead certainty," answered the man whose turn it was to play. "He knows he's sampled about everything that goes on in a mining camp or anywhere else in a new territory, and he's

nothing to show for himself that St. Peter could take as a passport. But he isn't worrying, as long as he's provided for in this world. His pension keeps him in clothes and tobacco and when he's too old to work the Soldiers' Home will take him in."

"He's not worrying over the next world either," some one else added. "Mrs. Welsh says he has sixty dollars salted down in bank that he's saved to have masses said for the repose of his soul. Not that he's tied *his* belief to anything in particular, but he once had a wife back in his young days, who was one of the faithful."

"Let us hope that particular bank won't suspend payment," laughed Batty, "for it's his only hope of ever joining his Belle Mahone."

Dane came back from his drive with new interest in life. The sight of the

olive groves and almond orchards, the alfalfa fields and acres of lemon and orange trees lying green and gold between the irrigating canals, had lured him away from thoughts of his condition. He was not so shy and speechless that day at dinner. He even walked out on the desert a little way that afternoon, with Buddy clinging to his hand to pilot him to the wonderful nest of a trap-door spider. For a day or two he made feeble efforts to follow Batty Carson's example. Instead of watching the eastern horizon he watched Mrs. Courtland ply her embroidery needle or bead-work loom, preparing for the Christmas now so near at hand.

But it was only a few days till he was back in the depths again. The slightest exertion exhausted him. Burning with fever he clung to Jimmy, talking of the white hillsides at home, the icicles on the

eaves, the snow-laden cedars. Then when the chill came again he shivered under the blankets Jimmy tucked around him, and buried his face in the pillow to hide the tears that shamed him.

"I can't help it," he gasped at last. "I hate myself for being so babyish. But, Jimmy, it's like living in a nightmare to have that one thought haunt me day and night. I don't mind the dying — I'll be glad to go. It racks me so to cough. But it's the dying so far away from home — alone! I can't go without seeing mother *once* more! Just *once,* Jimmy, one little minute."

The old man's mouth twitched. There was no answer to that kind of an appeal.

"Mail!" called a voice outside. The ranch wagon had come back from Phœnix, and Hillis was going from tent to tent with the letter-bag. "Mr. Dane Ward," he called. "One letter and one

package. Christmas is beginning a week ahead of time," he added as Jimmy came to the door.

Dane sat up and opened the letter first, with fingers that trembled in their eagerness. He read snatches of it aloud, his face brightening with each new item of interest.

"They're going to have an oyster supper and a Christmas tree for the Sunday-school. And Charlie Morrow broke into the mill-pond last Saturday, and the whole skating party nearly drowned trying to fish him out. Mr. Miller's barn burned last week, and Ed Morris and May Dawson ran away and were married at Beaver Dam Station. It's like opening a window into the village and looking down every street to get mother's letters. I can see everybody that passes by, and pretty near smell what people are cooking for dinner. She's sending

my Christmas present a week ahead of time, because from what I wrote about the cold nights she was sure I'd need it right away. Cut the string, please, Jimmy."

Two soft outing flannel shirts rolled out of the paper wrapping. Dane spread them on the bed beside him with fond touches.

"She made every stitch of them herself," he said proudly, smiling as he turned the page for the last sentence.

"Christmas will not be Christmas to us with you so far away, dear boy, but we are going to be brave and make as merry as we can, looking forward to the time when that blessed land of sunshine will send you back to us, strong and well."

The letter dropped from his hands and Jimmy heard him say with a shivering, indrawn breath, "But that time will

never come! Never!" Then catching up the mass of soft flannel as if it brought to him in some way the touch of the dear hands that had shaped it, he flung himself back on the pillow, burying his face in it to stifle the sobs that would slip out between his clenched teeth.

"Never go home again!" he moaned once. "*God!* How can I stand it!" Then in a pitiful whisper, "Oh, mother, I *want* you so."

Jimmy got up and tip-toed softly out of the tent.

That night, Batty Carson, taking his after-supper constitutional, strode up and down outside the camp, his hands in his overcoat pockets. The little tents, each with a lamp inside, throwing grotesque shadows on the white canvas walls, made him think of a cluster of Chinese lanterns. Only the last one in the last row

was dark, and moved by a friendly impulse to ask after Dane's welfare, he strolled over towards it. Had it not been for the odour of a rank pipe, he might have stumbled over Jimmy, in the camp chair outside Dane's door.

"Playing sentinel?" he asked.

"No, just keeping the lad company a spell. He can't bear to hear them kiotes howl."

"You're lively company, I must say," bantered Batty. "I didn't hear much animated conversation as I came up."

Jimmy glanced over his shoulder. "No," he said in a lower tone. "He's asleep now."

Lighting a cigar, Batty unfolded a camp stool which was leaning against one of the guy ropes, and seated himself. Jimmy seemed in a confidential mood.

"I've been setting here," he began, "studying about a Christmas present

that had ought to be made this year. *I* ain't got no call to make it, but there's plenty of others that could do it and never miss it. I've got an old uncle that sets 'em up now and then, but he isn't liable to send me another check before February, so *I* can't do it."

"Oh, your Uncle Sam," laughed Batty, remembering Jimmy's pension and the object of his savings. "Well," speaking slowly between puffs, "I'm not counting on making any Christmas presents this year except to myself. Being sick makes a man selfish, I suppose. But if I have to be exiled out here in the cactus and greasewood, I intend to make it as pleasant for myself as possible. So I know what's going into my Christmas stocking: the dandiest little saddle horse this side of the Mississippi, and a rifle that can knock the spots off anything in Salt River valley."

When Jimmy answered his voice was still lower, for a cough had sounded in the tent behind them.

"Well, Sandy Claws and I ain't never been acquainted, so to speak. I neither give or get, but if I had the price of a saddle horse in my breeches it wouldn't go into *my* stocking. It 'ud take that boy in there back home to die, as fast as steam cars can travel. A man would almost be justified in giving up his hope of heaven to give a poor soul the comfort that would be to him."

The distant barking of coyotes sounded through the starlight. Jimmy pulled at his pipe in silence and Batty sat blowing wreaths of cigar smoke around his head until a woman's voice struck musically across the stillness.

"Come, little son, hug father Ted good night."

As Batty watched the shadow panto-

mime on the white canvas walls of the tent in front of him, the baby arms clasped around the young father's neck, and the beautiful girl bending over them, laughing, he understood the miracle that was bringing Courtland back from the very grave. The screen door slammed and she came out with the child in her arms, a golf-cape wrapped over his night-gown. Then the shadows changed to the next tent. Buddy, with his bare pink toes stretched out toward the little drum stove, sat in his mother's lap and listened to the good night story.

It was a Christmas story as well, and the three Wise Men in quest of the star-lit manger came out of the shadows of a far-gone past, to live again before the glowing wonder of a little child's eyes. Once he glanced over his shoulder when she told of the silver bells jingling on the trappings of the camels, and he clasped

his dimpled hands with a long, satisfied sigh when the gifts were opened at last before the Christ-child's cradle.

"An' nen the little king was *so* glad," he added, lying back happily against his mother's shoulder.

"Yes, dear heart."

"An' the little king's mothah was glad, too," he persisted. "She liked people to give fings to her little boy."

"Oh yes, she was the happiest of all. Now shut your eyes, little son, and we'll rock-a-bye-baby-in-the-tree-top."

The two shadows were merged into one as the rocking chair swayed back and forth a moment in time to a low, sweet crooning. Then Buddy sat up straight and laid an imperative hand on the cheek pressed against his curly hair.

"Stop singin', Mothah Ma'wy!" he demanded. "I want to go there. *I* want to take 'em fings to make 'm glad!"

She tried to explain, but he would not be appeased. The little mouth quivered with disappointment. "If they're all gone away up to heaven how can I *find* the king, Mothah Ma'wy?"

"Oh, little son, we still have the star!" she cried, clasping him close and kissing him.

"Show it to me!" he demanded, slipping from her lap and pattering towards the door in his bare feet. She caught him up again with more kisses, and holding him close began to grope for words simple enough to make it plain — that the Star which wise men follow now, when they go with gifts for the Christ-child's gladdening, is the Star of love and good-will to men, and the Way lies near at hand through the hearts of his poor and needy.

When she finished at last, Batty's cigar had gone out, and Jimmy, stirred by

some old memory or by some new vision, was staring fixedly ahead of him with unseeing eyes. Neither man moved until the last note of the lullaby, "Oh little town of Bethlehem," faltered into silence. Then without a word, each rose abruptly and went his separate way.

It was reported in camp next day at dinner that Dane was going home, and that the doctor on his morning rounds had consented to engage a sleeper for him and help him aboard the first Eastern-bound train. While the doctor gave it as his opinion that it was suicidal for any one in his condition to go back to such a climate in mid-winter, he offered no remonstrance. Nor could any one else in the face of such pathetic joy as Dane's, over his unexpected release.

It was with a sigh of relief that Mrs. Welsh turned from the departing carriage to begin her preparations for

Christmas. It would have been depressing for all the camp to have had any one in their midst during the holidays as ill as Dane; besides she had work for Jimmy other than nursing. There were trips to be made down the canal after palm leaves and the coral berries of the feathery pepper trees. There were the dining-room walls to be covered with those same Christmas greens, and since Mrs. Courtland wished it, a little cedar to be brought out from the town market, and decked for the centre of the table.

In the days which followed Dane's departure, Jimmy was so rushed with extra work that gradually he began to ignore his grudge against Matsu. One night, having absent-mindedly followed Hillis in filling his plate from the pots and pans on the stove, instead of cooking for himself, he thereafter ate whatever Matsu prepared without comment.

Maybe the mere handling of the Christmas symbols induced a mellower mood, for when the last taper was in place on the tinsel decked evergreen he felt so at peace with all mankind that he included the little heathen in his invitation, when he called Hillis in to admire his handiwork. He was whistling softly when he stepped out doors from the dining-room, and turned the latch behind him. The shaggy old dog rose up from the door-mat and followed him as he strolled down towards the highroad. He was in his shirt-sleeves, for the dusk was warm and springlike. A great star hung over the horizon.

"It's Christmas eve, Banjo," he said in a confidential tone to the dog. "I guess Dane is home by this time. By rights he ought to have got there this morning."

Banjo responded with a friendly wag

and crowded closer to rub his head against Jimmy. For the twentieth time that day the old man's hand stole down into his empty pocket on a fruitless errand.

"Nary a crumb," he muttered, "and not a cent left to get one. Banjo, I'd give both ears for a good chaw right now. I'm not grudging it, but I sure would 'a' held back a dime or two if I hadn't thought there was another plug in the shack."

Banjo bristled up and growled.

"Hush, you beast!" scolded Jimmy. "You ought to be so full of peace and good-will this here Christmas eve that there wouldn't be room for a single growl in your ugly old hide. *I'd* be if I could lay teeth on the chaw I'm hankering for. What's the matter with you anyhow?"

With his hand on the dog's head to

quiet him, he peered down the dim road. A boy on a shaggy Indian pony was loping towards him.

"Is this Welsh's ranch?" he called. "Then I've got a telegram for somebody. It's addressed mighty queer — just says 'Jimmy, care of Mrs. Clara Welsh.'"

"Well, I'm a — *greaser!*" was all that Jimmy could ejaculate as he reached for the yellow envelope. He turned it over with growing curiosity. "First telegram I ever got in my life, and me sixty odd years," he muttered.

"There's a dollar charges for delivering it out so far," said the boy. Jimmy's hand went down into his pocket again.

"I'll have to go to the house for it," he said. "You wait."

Then he waited himself. Batty Carson was strolling down the road. It would be easier to apply to him for the loan than to Mrs. Welsh.

"Has the old uncle died and left you a fortune?" laughed Batty, as he handed over the dollar.

"Blamed if I can make out," answered Jimmy, holding the scrap of paper at arms length and squinting at it. "I ain't got my specs. Here! you read it."

Batty, taking the telegram, read in his hoarse whisper:

> "Dane arrived safely God bless you Matthew twentyfive forty.
>
> Harriet Ward."

Then he looked up for an explanation. Jimmy was staring at him open-mouthed. "Well, if that ain't the blamedest message ever was," he exclaimed. "I don't know any sucker named Matthew. Is the woman plumb crazy?"

Batty looked up from the second reading, enlightened.

"No, I take it she wanted to send you some sort of a Christmas greeting, but

probably she's as poor as she is pious and had to count her words. Come on, we'll look up Matthew twenty-five and forty. I guess I haven't forgotten how to do such stunts, even if it has been such a precious while since the last one."

He led the way to his tent, and while Jimmy lighted the lamp he began burrowing through his trunk. Down at the very bottom he found it, the Book he was looking for, then the chapter and the verse. When he cleared his throat and read the entire telegram it sounded strangely impressive in his hoarse whisper:

"Dane arrived safely. God bless you. 'And the king shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'"

There was an awkward pause as they faced each other a moment, pondering

the queer message. Then as a conscious red began to burn up through the tan of Jimmy's weather-beaten face, Batty understood.

"*You* sent that boy home to his mother," he began, but Jimmy, bolting out of the tent, shambled off, shamefaced, through the dusk.

For a long time Batty stood in the door looking out over the darkening desert. The one star swinging above the horizon seemed to point the way to a little home among snow-clad hills, where Christmas gladness had reached its high-tide. Presently as the supper-bell rang, a voice came floating up from the bamboo thicket. Cracked and thin it was, but high and jubilant, as if the old man had forgotten that he had no tobacco for the refreshment of his soul in this world, and no prospect of a mass for its repose in the next.

"Wa-it for me at heav-un's gate,
Sweet Belle Mahone!"

"All right for you, old Jimmy," whispered Batty to himself. "In the game St. Peter keeps the score for, you'll be counted the highest card that *this* camp holds."

The Second Traveler

Gid Wiggan

In the Wake of a Honeymoon

The Second Traveler

Gid Wiggan
In the Wake of a Honeymoon

NO matter what kind of a procession paraded the streets of Gentryville, one unique tail-piece always brought up the rear. As the music of the band died away in the distance, and the pomp of the pageant dwindled down to the last straggling end, necks about to be relieved of their long tension invariably turned for one more look. It was then that old Gid Wiggan drove by in his Wild-cat Liniment wagon, as unfailing as the Z that ends the alphabet.

Lank and stoop-shouldered, with a long, thin beard that reached his lap, and a high, bell-crowned hat pulled down to meet his flabby, protruding ears, he of

himself was enough to provoke a laugh; but added to this he bore aloft on a pole the insignia that proclaimed his calling. It was a stuffed wild-cat, shelf-worn and weather-beaten, glaring with primeval fierceness with its one glass eye, and wearing a ridiculously meek expression on the side that had been bereft.

Across the ribs of the old black horse that drew the wagon was painted in white letters, "Wiggan's Wild-cat Liniment;" but as if this were not advertisement enough, the proprietor sowed little hand-bills through the crowd, guaranteeing that the liniment (made from the fat of the animal) would cure any ache in the whole category of human ills. He had followed in the wake of the Gentryville processions so many years that he had come to be regarded as much a matter of course as the drum-major or the clown.

Civic or military, the occasion made no difference. He followed a circus as impartially as he came after the troops reviewing before the Governor's stand, and he had been known to follow even one lone band-wagon through the town, on its mission of advertising a minstrel troupe.

There must have been something in the geography of the Wiggan family corresponding to a water-shed, else his course in life could not have differed so widely from his brother's. They had drifted as far apart as twin raindrops, fated to find an outlet in opposite seas. Indeed, so great was the difference that the daughters of the Hon. Joseph Churchill Wiggan (distinct accent on the last syllable when referring to them) scarcely felt it incumbent upon them to give his brother Gideon the title of uncle.

To Louise and Maud the proper ac-

centuation of their family name was vital, since it seemed to put up a sort of bar between them and the grotesque liniment peddler. The townspeople always emphasized the first syllable in speaking of him.

The brothers had turned their backs upon each other, even in the building of their houses. While only an alley separated their stables in the rear, the Hon. Joseph's mansion looked out on a spacious avenue, and old Gid's cottage faced a dingy tenement street. He had his laboratory in the loft of his stable, from the windows of which he could overlook his brother's back premises.

Maud and Louise, regarding him and his business in the light of a family skeleton, ignored him as completely as a family skeleton can be ignored when it is of the kind that will not stay in its allotted closet. It seemed to meet them every

time they opened their palatial front door. They could not turn a street corner without coming upon it. Only the ultra-sensitive young lady just home from the most select of fashionable schools can know the pangs that it cost Louise to see her family name staring at her in white letters from the bony sides of that old horse, in connection with a patent medicine advertisement; and the faintest whiff of any volatile oil suggesting liniment was enough to elevate Maud's aristocratic nose to the highest degree of scorn and disgust. Once, years ago, when the girls were too young to be ashamed of their eccentric kinsman, they had visited his laboratory out of childish curiosity. He had given them peanuts from a pocket redolent with liniment, and had asked them to come again, but they had had no occasion to repeat the visit until after they were grown.

It was the night before Louise's wedding day. They had both finished dressing for the evening, but, not quite satisfied with her appearance, Louise still stood before the mirror. She was trying to decide how to wear one of the roses which she had just shaken out of the great bunch on her dressing table. Ordinarily she would not have hesitated, for there was nothing she could do or wear that would not be admired by this little Western town. It was the card accompanying the roses which made her pause — the correct, elegant little card, engraved simply, "Mr. Edward Van Harlem." It seemed to confront her with the critical stare of the most formal New York aristocracy, coldly questioning her ability to live up to it and its traditions.

That the Van Harlems had violently opposed their son's marrying outside their own select circle she well knew.

His mother could not forgive him, but he was her idol, and she was following him to his marriage as she would have followed to his martyrdom. By this time she was probably in Gentryville, at the hotel. She had refused to meet Louise until the next day.

Louise laid the great, leafy-stemmed rose against the white dress she wore. It was a beautiful picture that her mirror showed her, and for an instant there was a certain proud lifting of the girlish head; a gesture not unworthy the haughty Mrs. Van Harlem herself. But the next moment a tender light shone in her eyes, as if some sudden memory had banished the thought of the Knickerbocker displeasure.

The maid had brought in the evening paper, and Maud, picking it up, began reading the headlines aloud. Louise scarcely heard her. When one's lover is

coming before the little cuckoo in the clock has time to call out another hour, what possible interest can press dispatches hold?

She laid the velvety petals against her warm cheek, and then softly touched them to her lips. At that, her own reflection in the mirror seemed to look at her with such a conscious smile that she glanced over her shoulder to see if her sister had been a witness too. As she did so, Maud dropped the paper with a horrified groan.

"Oh, Louise!" she cried. "What shall we do? There's to be an industrial parade to-morrow morning, with dozens of floats. The line of march is directly past the Continental Hotel. What will Mrs. Van Harlem say when she sees Uncle Gid's wagon and our name in the Wiggan Wild-cat advertisement?"

Louise dropped weakly into a chair,

echoing her sister's groan. The colour had entirely left her face. She was more in awe of her patrician lover and his family than she had acknowledged, even to herself.

"Think of that awful, old moth-eaten wild-cat on a pole!" giggled Maud, hysterically.

"Think of Uncle Gid himself!" almost shrieked Louise. "It would kill me to have him pointed out to the Van Harlems as father's brother, and somebody will be sure to do it. There's always somebody mean enough to do such things."

Maud pushed aside the curtain and peered out into the June twilight, now so dim that the street lamps had begun to glimmer through the dusk.

"If we could only shut him up somewhere," she suggested. "Lock him down cellar — by accident — until after

the parade, then he couldn't possibly disgrace us."

There was a long silence. Then Maud, dropping the curtain on the dusk of the outer world, turned from the window and came dancing back into the middle of the brightly lighted room.

"I've thought of a plan," she cried, jubilantly. "We can't do anything with Uncle Gid, but if the wild-cat and harness could be hidden until after the parade, that would keep him safely at home, hunting for them."

Louise caught at the suggestion eagerly, but immediately sank back with a despairing sigh. "It's of no use!" she exclaimed. "There's no one whom we could trust to send. If Uncle Gid should have the faintest suspicion of such a plot, there is nothing too dreadful for him to attempt in retaliation. He'd bring up the rear of the wedding procession itself

with that disreputable old beast on a pole, if he thought it would humble our pride."

As she spoke, she again caught sight of the little card that had come with the roses. It nerved her to sudden action. "I must go myself," she cried, desperately, springing up from her chair.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Maud, "you're surely joking. It's pitch dark in the stable by this time. Besides you might meet some one —"

"It's my only salvation," answered Louise, with an excited tremor in her voice. "Oh, you don't know the Van Harlems! Come on, Sis, and help me, that's a dear. It will be our last lark together."

"And our first one of this kind," answered Maud, drawing back. "Edward will be here in a few minutes, and —"

"All the more reason for us to hurry,"

interrupted Louise, taking a candle from the silver sconce on her dressing table, and snatching up some matches. "Come on!"

Carried away by her sister's impetuosity, Maud followed softly down the back stairs and across the tennis court. In their white dresses they glimmered through the dusk like ghosts. They were laughing under their breath when they started out, but as they crossed the dark alley they looked around nervously, and clutched each other like frightened schoolgirls.

Ten minutes later they were stealing up the back stairs again, carrying something between them wrapped in Maud's white petticoat. She had taken it off and wrapped it around the beast to avoid touching it. They had not been able to find a safe hiding place in the stable, and in sheer desperation had decided to carry

it home with them for the night. A strong odour of liniment followed in their wake, for Louise, in her frantic haste, had upset a bottle all over the wild-cat, and liberally spattered herself with the pungent, oily mixture.

As they hurried up the stairs, the cook suddenly opened the door into the back hall, sending a stream of light across them from the kitchen. There was a look of amazement on her startled face as she recognized her young mistresses coming in the back way at such an hour, but she was too well trained to say anything. She only sniffed questioningly as the strange smell reached her nostrils, then shut the door.

Just as the girls reached the head of the stairs there was a loud ring of the front door-bell. "Edward!" exclaimed Louise, helplessly letting her end of the bundle slip.

"Run and change your dress," said Maud. "You are all cobwebs and soot from dragging that harness into the coal-cellar. I'll attend to this."

Opening the door into a little trunk room at the end of the hall, she dragged her burden inside. An empty dress-box on the floor suggested an easy way of disposing of it. But when she had stuffed it in, still wrapped in the petticoat, not satisfied as to its secrecy, she opened an empty trunk and lifted the box into that. As she passed her sister's door Louise called her.

"Here!" she said, despairingly, holding out both hands. "We might as well give up. Smell!"

Maud's nose went up in air. "Liniment!" she exclaimed, solemnly. "Yes, it's fate. We can't get away from it."

"Edward will wonder what it is," said Louise, almost tearfully. "Oh, it seems

as if he must surely know. There's no mistaking *that!*"

Maud poured some cologne on her handkerchief, and rubbed it briskly over her sister's fingers. "You look as frightened as Blue Beard's wife when she dropped the key in the bloody closet."

All through her dressing, Louise kept sniffing suspiciously at her dainty fingers, and even when she was ready to go downstairs, stopped at the door to look back, like a second Lady Macbeth.

"'Not all the odours of Araby can sweeten that little hand,'" she said in a tragic whisper, and Maud answered under her breath:

"'You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will,
The scent of the roses will cling 'round it still.'"

A little later, Mrs. Wiggan's French maid, going into the trunk room with an armful of clothes, began packing the

bride's dainty trousseau. The trunks to be used for that purpose had been pointed out to her that afternoon.

As she opened the first one, such a penetrating odour greeted her that she drew back.

"Maybe ze camphor ball," she exclaimed aloud, lifting a corner of the box which nearly filled the bottom of the trunk. "Ah yes!" she went on, peeping in. "It ees mademoiselle's furs, what air protect from ze bugs by zat killing odair. It will presairve also ze woollens as well." Forthwith she began deftly packing a pile of snowy flannels around the box which held the family disgrace.

Twenty-four hours later, that trunk among a number of others was jogging along in a baggage car on its way to New York. It was checked to the pier from which the *Majestic* was to sail that week, and tagged, "For the hold."

It was the first parade that old Gid Wiggan had missed in twenty years, but it was not his niece's plotting which kept him at home. He lay with closed eyes in his dark little bedroom, too ill to know that a procession was passing. The old man had come to a place where he could no longer follow at the heels of a cheerful crowd. He must branch off by himself now, and find his solitary way as best he could, over a strangely lonesome road.

"He's an old miser, but it won't do to let him die like a heathen," said one of the neighbours, when his condition was discovered. So there were watchers by his bedside when the end came. Carriages had been rolling back and forth all the evening, and at last the ponderous rumbling aroused him.

"What's that?" he asked, opening his eyes as the sound of wheels reached him. "Is the parade coming?"

"Only the carriages driving back from St. Paul's," was the answer. "There's a wedding there to-night."

Old Gid closed his eyes again. "I remember now," he said. "It's Joe's little girl, but I didn't get a bid. They're ashamed of their old uncle. Well, they'll never be bothered with him any more now, nor any of his belongings."

The watchers exchanged glances and repeated the remark afterwards to the curious neighbours who came to look at the old man as he lay in his coffin. He had long had the reputation of being a miser, and more than one hand that day was passed searchingly over some piece of battered furniture. It was a common belief on that street that his fortune was stuffed away in some of the threadbare cushions.

His will, which came to light soon

after, directed that the rickety old house should be sold to pay the expenses of his last illness and burial, and to erect a monument over him. As if not content with humiliating his family in the flesh, he had ordered that it be cut in stone: "Here lies the manufacturer and proprietor of Wiggan's Wild-cat Liniment." The old horse, after taking the part of chief mourner at his funeral, was to be chloroformed.

Of kith and kindred there had been no mention until the last clause of the will, by which he left the meagre contents of his laboratory to a distant cousin in Arizona, whom he had never seen, but who bore the same name as himself, with the addition of a middle initial. This was the clause which turned Gentryville upside down:

"And I also give, devise and bequeath to the said Gideon J. Wiggan, my stuffed

wild-cat, hoping that he will find in it the mascot that I have found."

The same letter which informed the Arizona cousin of his legacy told him that it had mysteriously disappeared. No money was found in the house, and the disappearance of the wild-cat strengthened the prevalent belief that old Gid had used it as a receptacle for his savings, and had hidden it with all a miser's craftiness.

A week later the Arizona cousin appeared, having come East to unearth the mystery and to meet the remaining members of the Wiggan family, who, he understood, were living in Gentryville. He was too late. Maud and her mother had closed the house immediately after the wedding, and started on a summer jaunt, presumably to Alaska. His letters and telegrams received no answer and he could not locate his relatives, despite his

persistent efforts. The more he investigated, the more he became convinced that old Gid, alienated from his immediate family, had made him his heir on account of the name, and that a fair-sized fortune was stuffed away in the body of the missing wild-cat. A few leaves from a queerly kept old ledger confirmed this opinion. Most of them had been torn out, but judging from the ones he examined, the receipts from the liniment sales must have been far greater than people supposed.

He did not suspect his cousin Joseph's family being a party to the disappearance, until some servants' gossip reached him. The cook gave him his first clue, when a dollar jogged her memory. She remembered having seen the young ladies slipping up the back stairs the night before the wedding, carrying something between them. The laundress had asked

her the next day where the young ladies could have been to get their dresses so soiled in the evening. They were streaked with coal-soot and smelled strongly of the liniment that their uncle made. The French maid, who had not gone with her mistress, but had taken a temporary position with a dressmaker, recognized the odour when a bottle was brought to her. She swore that it was the same that mademoiselle's furs were filled with. She had smelled it first when she packed them in the trunk.

The evidence of the cook, the laundress and the maid was enough for Gideon J. Wiggan. He was a loud, rough man, without education, but so uniformly successful in all his business enterprises that he had come to have an unbounded conceit, and an unlimited faith in himself. "I never yet bit off any more than I could chew," he was fond of saying.

" I'm a self-made man. I've never failed in anything yet. I'm my own lawyer and my own doctor, and now I'll be my own detective; and I'll worm this thing out, if I have to go to Europe to do it."

To Europe he finally went. The happy bridal couple, making a tour of the cathedral towns of England, little dreamed what an avenging Nemesis was following fast in the wake of their honeymoon. From Canterbury to York he followed them, from York to Chester. They had always just gone. Evidently they were trying to elude him. Once he almost had his hand upon them. It was in London. He had reached the Hotel Metropole only two hours after their departure. They had gone ostensibly to Paris, but had left no address. He ground his teeth when he discovered that fact. How was he to trace them further without the slightest clue and without the faintest

knowledge of any foreign tongue? For the first time in his life he had to acknowledge himself baffled.

The next day, while he was making cautious inquiries at Scotland Yard, preparatory to engaging a first-class detective, he fell in with an old acquaintance, a man whom he had known in Arizona, and who was employed in the detective service himself. He had been sent over on the trail of some counterfeiters, and seemed to have an inexhaustible fund of information about every wealthy American who had gone abroad that summer. Within half an hour the baffled Gideon had put his case into his hands, humbly acknowledging that for once in his life he had bitten off more than he could chew.

Dinner was in progress in one of the most fashionable hotels of Paris. Ed-

ward Van Harlem, seated opposite his wife at one of the many little tables, looked around approvingly. His fastidious eyes saw nothing to criticize in the whole luxurious apartment, except perhaps the too cheerful expression of the man who served them. A more sphinx-like cast of countenance would have betokened better training. Then he looked critically at his wife. It may be that the elegant New Yorker was a trifle over-particular, but he could find no fault here. She was the handsomest woman in the room. She was dressed for the opera, and the priceless Van Harlem pearls around her white throat were worthy of a duchess. She wore them with the air of one, too, he noticed admiringly. He had not realized that a little Western girl could be so regal. Ah! if his mother could only see her now!

"What is it, Louise?" he asked, seeing

her give a slight start of surprise. "Those two men at the table behind you," she answered, almost in a whisper, for the service was so noiseless and the general conversation so subdued that she was afraid of being overheard. "They look so common and out of place in their rough travelling suits. They are the only persons in the room not in evening dress."

Van Harlem turned slightly and gave a supercilious glance behind him. "How did such plebeians ever get in here?" he said, frowning slightly. "I wish America would keep such specimens at home. It's queer they should stumble into an exclusive place like this. They must feel like fish out of water."

Louise tasted her soup, and then looked up again. One of the men was watching her like a hawk. His persistent gaze annoyed her, but there was a compelling

force about it that made her steal another glance at him. His eyes held hers an instant in startled fascination, then she dropped them with a sudden fear that made her cold and faint. The man bore a remarkable likeness to her Uncle Gideon. More than that, she had discovered some resemblance to her father in the determined chin and the way his hair rolled back from his forehead. That little droop of the lip was like her father's, too. Could it be that there was some remote tie between them and that the stranger was staring at her because he, too, saw a family likeness? She was afraid for her husband to turn around lest he should discover it also.

Ever since the arrival of the mails that morning, she had been in a state of nervous apprehension. Somebody had sent her a marked copy of the *Gentryville Times*, with an account of her uncle's will

and the heir's vain search for his legacy. She had wanted to write immediately to Maud, and ask if she had remembered, in the confusion that followed the wedding, to restore the old man's property, but Edward had carried her away for a day's sight-seeing, and she had had no opportunity.

As she sat idly toying with her dinner, some intuition connected this man with her Uncle Gideon, and she was in a fever of impatience to get away, for fear he might obtrude himself on her husband's notice. When they had first swept into the dining-room, the Arizona cousin had leaned over the table until his face almost touched the detective's. "They're stunners! Ain't they?" he whispered. "Wonder if any of my money bought them pearls and gew-gaws. Well, this show's worth the box-seat prices we paid to get next to 'em. I wonder if the waiter

would have promised to put us alongside if I'd offered him any less than a five-franc piece." Then, as Louise's eyes fell before his in embarrassment, he muttered, "She looks guilty, doesn't she! I'll bet my hat she suspicions what we're after."

The two men were only beginning their salad course, when Van Harlem beckoned a waiter and gave an order in French. "What did he say?" asked Wiggan, suspiciously. "I wish I could make out their beastly lingo."

"He sent to call a carriage, and to tell the maid to bring the lady's wraps. They're going to the opera."

"You mean they're going to give us the slip again! Come on! We must stop 'em!"

"Now, Gid, you just cool down," advised the detective, calmly. "I'm working this little game. It's a family affair

and there's no use making a row in public. There's plenty of time." But his client had no ear for caution. The Van Harlems had risen, and were going slowly down the long drawing-room. All eyes followed the beautiful American girl and the aristocratic young fellow who carried himself like a lord. The mirror-lined walls flashed back the pleasing reflection from every side, and then replaced it with a most astonishing sight.

In and out between the little tables with their glitter of cut-glass and silver, dashed a common-looking fellow in a coarse plaid suit. Upsetting chairs, whisking table-cloths from their places, bumping into solemn waiters with their laden trays, he seemed oblivious to everything but the escaping couple. The detective had detained him as long as possible, and the couple had almost reached

the door when he started in frantic pursuit. He reached them just as they stepped into the corridor. He tried to curb his trembling voice, but in his excitement it rang out to the farthest corner of the great apartment, high above the music of the violins, playing softly in a curtained alcove.

"You want your *what?*" demanded the elegant Van Harlem in a tone that would have frozen a less desperate man.

"I want that stuffed wild-cat," he roared, "that your wife's uncle left me in his will, and you made off with. I came all the way from America for it, and I'll have it now, or you'll go to jail, sure as my name is Gideon J. Wiggan."

Louise, already unnerved by her fears at dinner, and exhausted by the tiresome day of sight-seeing, started forward, deathly pale. It seemed to her that the man had shouted out her name so that all

Paris must have heard. The disgrace had followed her even over seas.

She looked up piteously at her husband, and then fell fainting in his arms.

"The man's crazy," exclaimed Van Harlem, as he strode with her toward the elevator. "Here, waiter, call the police and have that lunatic put out of the house. He's dangerous."

It was only a moment until he had reached their rooms and had laid Louise gently on a couch, but as he turned to ring for the maid, the two men confronted him on the threshold. The detective bolted the door, and the Arizona cousin took out his revolver.

"No, you don't ring that bell," he exclaimed, seeing Van Harlem move in the direction of the button; "nor you don't get out of here until you hand over that wild-cat. You've got it and your wife knows it. That's why she fainted. My

friend here is a detective, and we're going through your things till we find it, for it's full of gold."

Van Harlem moved forward to wrest away the revolver, but the detective presented his. "No, you can't do that either," he said, quietly. "I'm going to see that my friend gets his rights."

With the helpless feeling that he was in the hands of two madmen, Van Harlem stood by while trunk after trunk was overhauled, and the trousseau scattered all over the room. The one containing the flannels had not been unlocked since it left Gentryville. It was the last to be examined.

Louise opened her eyes with a little shriek as a familiar odour penetrated to her consciousness. They had unearthed the family skeleton. "*Louise!*" cried her husband as the old moth-eaten animal was dragged from under her dainty

lingerie. "What under *heaven* does this mean?" Another fainting spell was her only answer, and the one yellow glass eye leered up at him, as if defying the whole Van Harlem pedigree.

A minute later a stream of saw-dust oozed out from the beast's body, covering the piles of be-ribboned lace and linen, scattered all over the velvet carpet. Then a limp, shapeless skin with its one yellow eye still glaring, was kicked across the room. The Arizona cousin had no further use for it. He had come into his inheritance.

He walked across the room and gave the moth-eaten skin another kick. Then, with an oath, he handed his friend a slip of paper which he had found inside. Written across it in faded purple ink were three straggling lines. It was the formula for making the famous "Wiggan's Wild-cat Liniment."

The Third Traveler

The Clown
Towards His Accolade

The Third Traveler

The Clown
Towards His Accolade

THE little man in motley, thrusting his face through the curtains of the big circus tent, looked out on the gathering crowds and grinned. To him that assemblage of gaping backwoods pioneers was a greater show than the one he was travelling with, although the circus itself was a pioneer in its way. It was the first that had ever travelled through the almost unbroken forests of southern Indiana, and the fame of its performance at Vincennes had spread to the Ohio long before the plodding oxen had drawn the heavy lion cages half that distance. Such wild rumours of it had found their way across the sparsely settled hills and hollows, that families who

had not been out of sight of their cabin chimneys in five years or more were drawn irresistibly circusward.

Standing on a barrel, behind a hole in the canvas of the tent, the little clown amused himself by watching the stream of arrivals. As far as he could see, down the glaringly sunny road, rising clouds of dust betokened the approach of a seemingly endless procession. The whole county appeared to be flocking to the commons just outside of Burnville, where the annual training in military tactics took place on "muster days." People were coming by the wagon-load; nearly every horse carried double, and one old nag ambled up with a row of boys astride her patient back from neck to tail.

It was a hot afternoon in August, and a rank, almost overpowering odour of dog-fennel rose from the dusty weeds trampled down around the tent. The lit-

tle clown was half stifled by the dust, the heat, and the smell, and the perspiration trickled down his grotesquely painted face; but an occasional impatient flapping of his handkerchief to clear away the dust of a new arrival was all that betrayed his discomfort. He was absorbed in the conversation of a little group who, seated on a log directly under his peephole in the canvas, were patiently waiting for the performance to begin.

"My motley can't hold a candle to theirs," he thought, with an amused chuckle, as he surveyed them critically. "Judging by the cut of that girl's old silk dress, it was a part of her grandmother's wedding finery, and she probably spun the stuff for that sunbonnet herself. But the man — Moses in the bulrushes! People back East wouldn't believe me if I told them how he is togged out: tow trousers, broadcloth coat with

brass buttons, bare feet, and a coonskin cap, on this the hottest of all the hot dog-days ever created!"

He wiped his face again after this inventory, and steadied himself on the barrel. All unconscious of the audience they were entertaining, the man and girl were retailing the neighbourhood news to a tired-looking little woman, who sat on the log beside them, with a heavy baby in her arms. Their broad Western speech was as unfamiliar as it was amusing to their unseen listener. The barrel shook with his suppressed laughter, as they repeated the rumours they had heard regarding the circus.

"Thar was six oxen to draw the lion cages," said the girl, fanning herself with her sunbonnet. "Sam said them beasts roared to beat the Dutch — two of 'em. And he says thar's a pock-marked Irishman as goes around between acts with a

nine-banded armadillo. Ef ye tech it, ye'll never have the toothache no more. But thar's suthin better nor him. Sam says he 'lows we'll jest all die a-laughin' when we see the clown. The whole end of the State has gone wild over that air clown. Sam says they make more fuss over him than they would over the President ef he was t' come to this neck o' woods."

Here the auditor behind the scenes, with his hand on his heart, made such a low bow that he lost his balance, and nearly upset the barrel.

"I reckon the elyfunt will be the biggest sight," drawled the man. "That's what drawed me here. I ain't never seen even the picter of an elyfunt, and they say this is the real live article from t'other side of the world. They say it kin eat a cock of hay six foot high at one meal."

Here the baby stirred and fretted in the

woman's arms, and she wearily lifted it to an easier position against her shoulder.

"I wish Jim would hurry up," she sighed, wiping her hot face on a corner of her homespun apron.

"He's over yander helpin' ole Mis' Potter put up her ginger-bread stand," answered the girl, pointing to a large oak-tree on the edge of the common. "I seen 'em when she first come a-drivin' up on that big ox-sled, with a barrel of cider behind her. Law, I reckon she hain't never missed bein' on hand to sell her cakes and cider here on muster-days nary a time in ten years."

"'Tain't Mis' Potter," answered the older woman. "She's ben laid up with rheumatiz nearly all summer. It's Boone Ratcliffe's mother and his little William."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed the girl, with eager interest, standing up to

get a better view. "Not ole 'Madam Ratcliffe,' as pap calls her! I've ben honin' for a sight of her ever sence last spring, when I heerd she'd come out from Maryland. I used to hear about her afore Boone married M'randy. It was M'randy as told me about her. She said the ole lady was so rich and so stuck up that she never even tied her own shoes. They had slaves and land and money and everything that heart could wish, and they didn't think that M'randy was good enough for their only son. The letters they writ to Boone trying to head him off made M'randy so mad that I didn't suppose she'd ever git over it."

"She didn't," answered the little woman, "and it was scant welcome they got when they come. The letter they sent a month aforehand never got here, so of course nobody knowed they was a-comin', and they wa'n't nobody down

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to the Ohio River landin' to meet 'em. My Jim he happened to be thar when they got off'n the flatboat. They was dreadful put out when they didn't find Boone watchin' out for 'em, after comin' all the way from Maryland. Goodness knows what 'ud become of 'em ef Jim hadn't happened acrost 'em. The boat had gone on down the river and left 'em settin' thar on shore amongst the bales and boxes, as helpless as two kittens. Jim he seen 'em a-settin' thar, and bein' a soft-hearted chap and knowin' suthin' was wrong, he up and spoke.

"They was so bewildered like, 'count of not finding Boone and everything bein' so dif'runt from what they lotted on, that they was well-nigh daft. The ole man had ben sick ever sence they left Pittsburg, and they was both plum tuckered out with that long flatboat trip. Jim he jest h'isted 'em into the wagon, big chest

and all, and brought 'em on to Burnville.

"He said 'twas plain to be seen they hadn't never been used to roughin' it in any way. The ole gentleman was so sick he had to lean his head on her shoulder all the way, and she kep' a-strokin' his white hair with her fine soft fingers, and talkin' to him as if he'd ben a child. She tried to chirk him up by tellin' him they'd soon be to Boone's home, and talkin' 'bout when Boone was a little feller, tell Jim couldn't hardly stand it, he's that soft-hearted.

"He knew all the time what a disapp'intment was in store when they should set eyes on M'randy and the cabin, and find Boone growed to be so rough and common. It was dark when they got thar. Boone hadn't got home yit, and thar wa'n't a sign of a light about the place. So Jim lef' the ole folks setting

in the wagon, and went in to break the news to M'randy, knowin' what a high-tempered piece she is at times. He said she was settin' on the doorstep in her bare feet and dirty ole linsey-woolsey dress, jawin' little William. She'd ben a-makin' soap all day, and was dead tired.

"When Jim tole her what 'twas, the surprise seemed to strike her all of a heap. She never made a move to git up, and as soon as she could git her breath she begun to splutter like blue blazes. She said some folks had more burdens laid onto their shoulders than by rights was their share, and she couldn't see what made them ole people come trackin' out where they was neither wanted nor expected. She hadn't no airthly use for that stuck-up ole Mis' Ratcliffe, if she was Boone's mother. Oh, she jest talked up scan'lous.

"Jim he was afraid they would hear

her clear out in the road, so he kep' tryin' to smooth her down, and then he went out and tried to smooth things over to the ole people. By the time they'd climbed out'n the wagon and walked up the path, William had lit a candle, and she was holdin' it over her head in the doorway. The way Jim tole it I could jest see how they stood lookin' at each other, like as they was takin' their measures. Jim said they both seemed to see the difference, M'randy so frowsy and common-lookin', for all her prettiness, and the ole lady so fine and aristocratic in her elegant dress and bunnit. He said he'd never fergit how white and tired-lookin' their old faces showed up in the candle-light, and sort of disapp'inted, too, over the welcome they'd ben expectin' and didn't git.

"M'randy didn't even offer to shake hands. After she'd stared a minute she said, sorter stiff-like, 'Well, I s'pose you

may as well come on in.' Jim says there was tears in the ole lady's eyes when she follered M'randy into the cabin, but she wiped 'em away real quick, and spoke up cheerful to ole Mr. Ratcliffe.

"The room was in such a muss there wa'n't an empty chair to set on tell M'randy jerked the things off two of'm and kicked the stuff out of sight under the bed. Then she dusted 'em with her apron, and said in a long-sufferin' sort of tone that she reckoned 'twas about as cheap settin' as standin'.

"Ole Mis' Ratcliffe tried to apologize fer comin'. She said that their daughter back in Maryland tried to keep 'em from it, but that Boone couldn't come to them, and it had been ten years since he had left home, and they felt they must see him once more before they died. Jim said it was so pitiful the way she talked that he got all worked up."

"Why didn't they turn right around and go home the next day?" cried the girl, with flashing eyes. "That's M'randy all over again when she once gits her temper up, but people as rich as them don't have to put up with nobody's high and mighty ways."

"They are not rich any more," was the answer. "A few years ago they lost all they had, slaves, land, and everything, and their married daughter in Baltimore is takin' care of 'em. She was sure they wouldn't find it agreeable out here, so she provided the money for 'em to come back on; but the ole man lost his wallet comin' down on that flatboat, and they don't feel as they could write back and ask her for more. She's good to 'em as can be, but she hasn't got any more than she needs, and they hate to ask for it. That's why the ole lady is here to-day, takin' Mis' Potter's place. Boone per-

suaded her to come, and tole her if she could make as much as Mis' Potter always does, it will be enough to pay their way back to Maryland. He helped her get ready. I don't know what he said to M'randy to make her stand aside and not interfere, but she made up the gingerbread as meek as Moses, and let Jim roll the barrel of cider out of the smoke-house without a word."

"Why don't Boone scratch around and raise the money somehow?" put in the man, who had chewed in interested silence as he listened to the story. Now he stopped to bite another mouthful from a big twist of tobacco he took from his broadcloth coat pocket.

"'Pears like their only son is the one that ought to do fer 'em, and at least he could make M'randy shut up and treat his parents civil."

"Boone!" sniffed the woman. "Why,

he's under M'randy's thumb so tight that he dassent sneeze if she don't take snuff. Besides, he's ben on the flat of his back off and on all summer, with dumb ague. It's run into a slow fever now, and it takes every picayune they can scrape together to git his medicines. Then, too, M'randy sprained her ankle a month or so back, and things have been awful sence then. The ole man he don't realize he is in the way, he's so childish and broken down. He jest sorter droops around, pinin' for the comforts he's always ben used to, in a way that almost breaks his ole wife's heart. She feels it keen enough for both of 'em, because she can't bear to see him lackin' anything he needs, and she'd rather die than be a burden to anybody.

" I tell Jim I'm sorry for the whole set, and I can see it isn't the pleasantest thing for M'randy to give up a room to them

when thar's only two in the cabin, and her ways ain't their ways, and their bein' thar puts everything out of joint; but Jim he sides with the ole people. He's mighty sorry for 'em, and would have put his hand in his own pocket and paid their expenses long ago back to Maryland, ef he'd a-ben able. He's ben a great comfort to the ole lady, he's jest that softhearted. I hope she'll sell out as fast as Mis' Potter always done."

Before the girl could echo her wish, there was a discordant scraping inside the tent, a sound of the band beginning to tune their instruments. Instantly there was a rush toward the tent, and all three of the little group sprang to their feet. The little woman looked wildly around for Jim, with such an anxious expression that the clown lingered a moment, regardless of the stream of people pouring into the entrance so near him that the cur-

tain which screened him from public view was nearly torn down. He waited until he saw a burly, good-natured man push his way through the crowds and transfer the heavy baby from the woman's tired arms to his broad shoulder. Then he turned away with a queer little smile on his painted face.

"He's jest that soft-hearted," he repeated, half under his breath. The woman's story had stirred him strangely. "It's a pity there's not more like him," he continued. "I guess that too few Jims and too many M'randys is what is the matter with this dizzy old planet."

"What's that ye're grumbling about, Humpty Dumpty?" asked the pock-marked Irishman as he came up with his nine-banded armadillo, all ready for the performance. Then in his most professional tones: "If it is the toothache yez have now, I'll be afther curing it en-

toirely wid wan touch of this baste from ——"

"Oh, get out!" exclaimed the clown, putting his hand on the tall Irishman's shoulder and springing lightly down from the barrel. "I'm dead sick of all this monkey business. If it wasn't a matter of bread-and-butter I wouldn't laugh again in a year."

"Ye couldn't make anybody out there in that big aujence belave it," laughed the Irishman. "They think yer life is wan perpetooal joke; that ye're a joke yerself for that matther, a two-legged wan, done up in cap and bells."

"You're right," said the clown bitterly, looking askance at his striped legs. "But 'a man's a man for a' that and a' that,' and he gets tired sometimes of always being taken for a jesting fool. Curse this livery!"

The Irishman looked at him shrewdly.

"Ye should have gone in for a 'varsity cap and gown, and Oi've been thinking that maybe ye did start out that way."

A dull red glowed under the paint on the clown's face, and he ran into the ring in response to the signal without a reply. A thundering round of applause greeted him, which broke out again as he glanced all around with a purposely silly leer. Then he caught sight of Jim's honest face, smiling expectantly on him from one of the front benches. It struck him like a pain that this man could not look through his disguise of tawdry circus trappings, and see that a man's heart was beating under the clown's motley. There came a sudden fierce longing to tear off his outward character of mountebank, for a moment, and show Jim the stifled nature underneath, noble enough to recognize the tender chivalry hidden in the rough exterior of the awkward back-

woodsman, and to be claimed by him as a kindred spirit.

As he laughed and danced and sang, no one dreamed that his thoughts kept reverting to scenes that the woman's story had called up, or that a plan was slowly shaping in his mind whereby he might serve the homesick old soul waiting out under the oak-tree for the performance to be done.

No wonder that people accustomed to seeing old Mrs. Potter in that place, gowned in homespun, and knitting a coarse yarn sock, had stopped to stare at the newcomer. Such a type of high-born, perfect ladyhood had never appeared in their midst before. The dress that she wore was a relic of the old Maryland days; so was the lace cap that rested like a bit of rare frost-work on her silvery hair. Mrs. Potter knew everybody for miles around, and was ready to laugh and

joke with any one who stopped at her stand. Mrs. Ratcliffe sat in dignified silence, a faint colour deepening in her cheeks like the blush of a winter rose. It was so much worse than she had anticipated to have these rude strangers staring at her, as if she were a part of the show. She breathed a sigh of relief when the music began, for it drew the crowds into the tent as if by magic. She and little William were left entirely alone.

With the strident boom of the bass viol came the rank smell of the dog-fennel that hurrying feet had left bruised and wilting in the sun. All the rest of her life, that warm, weedy odour always brought back that humiliating experience like a keen pain. The horses in the surrounding grove stamped restlessly and whinnied as they switched off the flies. The long ride and the unaccustomed labour of the morning had exhausted her.

She began to nod in her chair, giving herself up to a sense of drowsiness, for as long as the people were in the tent she would have no occupation.

Her white head dropped lower and lower, until presently she was oblivious to all surroundings. Little William, sitting on the old wood-sled with his back against the cider barrel, was forgotten. M'randy and the ill-kept cabin vanished entirely from her memory. She was back in the old Maryland days on her father's plantation, hedged about with loving forethought, as tenderly sheltered as some delicate white flower. Every path had been made smooth for her, every wish anticipated all her life long, until that day when they had set their faces westward to find Boone. It was coming down the Ohio on that long journey by flatboat that she suddenly woke to the knowledge that her husband's illness had left him a

broken-down old man, as weak and irresponsible as a child.

But mercifully her dreams were back of that time. They were back with Boone in his gay young boyhood, when he danced minuets with the Governor's daughter, and entertained his college friends in lordly style on the old plantation. Back of that time when the restlessness of his 'teens sent him roving over the Alleghanies to the frontier, regardless of their long-cherished ambitions for him. Back of the time when in a sudden mad whim he had married a settler's pretty daughter, whom he was ashamed to take back to civilization when he thought of the Baltimore belles to whom he had paid boyish court. He had not stopped to consider her rough speech and uncouth manners. He had been a long time out in the wilderness, he was only twenty, and her full red lips tempted him.

If the dreams could only have stopped then, that little space she slept, while the circus band thrummed and drummed inside the tent, and the shadows of the hot August afternoon lengthened under the still trees outside, would have been a blessed respite. But they repeated the unpleasant parts as well. They came on down to the night of that unwelcome arrival. They showed her the days when Boone lay prostrated with a slow malarial fever; the days when the fierce heat made him drag his pallet desperately from one corner to another across the bare puncheons, trying to find a spot where he could be comfortable. She could see him lying as he had so often lain, with his face turned toward the back door, looking out with aching eyes on the tall corn that filled the little clearing. In his feverish wanderings he complained that it was crowding up around the house

trying to choke him. And there was little William, little nine-year-old William, sitting on the floor beside him, attempting to flap away the flies with a bunch of walnut leaves. There were long intervals sometimes when the heat overpowered the child with drowsiness. Then the walnut branch wavered uncertainly or stopped in mid-air, while he leaned against the table leg with closed eyes and open mouth. Sometimes Miranda slept on the door-step, bare-footed, as usual, with a dirty bandage around her sprained ankle.

In that short sleep she seemed to relive the whole summer, that had dragged on until her sense of dependence grew to be intolerable. Miranda's shrill complaining came penetrating again into the tiny room where she sat by her husband's bed, and the old head was bowed once more on his pillow as she sobbed: "Oh, Will-

iam, dear heart, if the Lord would only take us away together! I cannot bear to be a burden to any one!" It was the sound of her own sobbing that awakened her, and she sat up with a sudden start, realizing that she had been asleep. She must have slept a long time. In that interval of unconsciousness the tavern-keeper from Burnville had erected a rival stand a few rods away.

She saw with dismay his attractive display of "store" goods. Then her face flushed as he began to set out whisky bottles and glasses. Her first impulse was to gather up her belongings and get home as quickly as possible. In her perplexity she looked around for little William. Regarding a circus with such contempt herself, it had never occurred to her that he would care to see it.

He was a timid little fellow, who always hid when company came to the

house, and he had never been away from home more than a dozen times in his life. The crowds frightened him, and he stayed as closely as a shadow at his grandmother's elbow until the music began. Then he forgot himself. It thrilled him indescribably, and he watched with longing eyes as the people crowded into the tent. It seemed to him that he must certainly go wild if he could not follow, but they had sold nothing. Even if they had, he would not have dared to ask for enough money to pay his admission, it seemed such an enormous sum. As she began to nod in her chair he began to edge nearer the tent. He could catch now and then a word of the clown's jokes, and hear the roars of laughter that followed. When the clown began to sing, William had one ear pressed against the tent. People clapped and cheered uproariously at the last line of every stanza. He

could not hear enough of the words to understand why. In the general commotion he was conscious of only one thing: he was on the outside of that tent, and he must get inside or die.

Regardless of consequences, he threw himself on the grass and wriggled around until he succeeded in squeezing himself under the canvas. There was a moment of dizzy bewilderment as he sat up and looked around. Then some cold, squirming thing touched the back of his neck. He gave a smothered cry of terror; it was the elephant's trunk. He had come up directly under the animal "from t'other side of the world, that could eat a six-foot cock of hay at one meal."

As he sat there, shivering and blubbering, afraid to move because he did not know which end of the clumsy monster was head and which tail, he heard a loud guffaw. The pock-marked Irishman

who had charge of the nine-banded armadillo had seen the little side-show, and it doubled him up with laughter. He roared and slapped his thigh and laughed again until he was out of breath. Then he gravely wiped his eyes and drew the boy out from under the great animal. William clung to him, sobbing. Then the warm-hearted fellow, seeing that he was really terrified, took him around and showed him all the sights. In the delight of that hour, home, grandmother, and the world outside were completely forgotten.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Ratcliffe sat wondering what had become of the boy. People began to straggle out of the tent. There was to be another performance after dark, and she expected to find her customers among those who stayed for that. The tavern-keeper began calling attention to his refreshments in a facetious way that drew an amused crowd around him. Her

hopes sank, as group after group passed her without stopping. Two young fellows from the village who had been drinking pushed roughly against her table.

"Hi, Granny!" hiccoughed one of them. "Purty fine doughnuts, ole girl!" He gathered up a plateful, and tried to find his pocket with unsteady fingers. She stood up with a sickening feeling of helplessness, and looked around appealingly. Just then a heavy hand struck the fellow in the mouth, and jerked him back by his coat-collar. The pock-marked Irishman, to whom the bewildered little William still clung, had undertaken to find the boy's grandmother for him. The child's artless story had aroused his warmest sympathies, and nothing could have given him greater pleasure than this opportunity to fight for her.

"Put thim back, you ugly thafe o' the

worruld," he roared, "or Oi'll throw yez entoirely over the sorcuss tint!"

The man bristled up for a fight, but one look into the big Irishman's glowering eyes sobered him enough to make him drop the cakes and slink away.

The Irishman looked embarrassed as Mrs. Ratcliffe began to thank him with tears in her eyes, and hurried back to the tent. The look of distress deepened on her face. Everybody passed her table for the one made popular by the loud-voiced man who knew so well how to advertise his wares. With a stifled groan she looked around on the great pile of provisions she had brought. What quantities of good material utterly wasted! What would Miranda say?

As she looked around her in dismay, she saw the clown coming toward her, still in his cap and bells. He had been watching the scene from a distance. Her

distress was pitiful. To be compelled to wait on this jesting fool like any common bar-maid would fill her cup of degradation to overflowing. What could she do if he accosted her familiarly as he did every one else?

He leaned over and took off his grotesque cap. "Madam," he said, in a low, respectful tone, "I have no money, but if you will kindly give me a cake and a mug of cider, you shall soon have plenty of customers."

Greatly surprised, she filled him a cup, wondering what he would do. There was a rush for that part of the grounds as the hero of the hour appeared. He had been funny enough in the ring, but now they found his jokes irresistible. His exaggerated praises of all he ate and drank were laughed at, but everybody followed his example. More than one gawky boy bought something for the sake of being

made the subject of his flattering witticisms. The tavern-keeper called and sang in vain. As long as the clown told funny stories and praised Mrs. Ratcliffe's gingerbread, all other allurements were powerless. He stayed with her until the last cake had been bought and the cider barrel was empty.

It was nearly sundown when she started home. Jim came up to roll the empty barrel on to the sled, to place her chair against it, and help little William hitch up the oxen; but when she looked around to thank the little clown, he had disappeared. No one could tell where he had gone.

Never in her girlhood, rolling home in the stately family coach from some gay social conquest, had she felt so victorious. She jingled the silk reticule at her side with childish pleasure. She could hardly wait for the slow oxen to plod the two

long miles toward home, and when they stopped in front of the little cabin she was trembling with eagerness. Hurrying up the path through the gathering dusk, she poured her treasure out on her husband's bed.

"Look!" she cried, laying her face on the pillow and slipping an arm around his neck. "We are going back to Maryland, dear heart!" She nestled her faded cheek against his with a happy little sob. "Oh, William, we need not be a burden any longer, for we're going home to-morrow!"

Later, the full August moon swung up over the edge of the forest. It flooded the little clearing with its white light, and turned the dusty road in front of the cabin to a broad band of silver. A slow, steady tramp of many feet marching across a wooden bridge in the distance

fell on the intense stillness of the summer night.

"It's the circus," said Boone, raising his head to listen. "I reckon they're travellin' by night on account of the heat, and they'll be pushin' on down to the river."

His wife limped to the door and sat down on the step to watch for its coming, but his mother hurried out to the fence and leaned across the bars, waiting.

A strange procession of unwieldy monsters, never before seen in this peaceful woodland, loomed up in the distance, huge and black, while a stranger procession of fantastic shadows stalked grimly by its side. The sleepy keepers dozed in their saddles, filing by in ghostly silence, save for the clanking of trace-chains and the creaking of the heavy lion cages.

At the extreme end of the long line came the tired little clown on the trick

mule. A sorrier-looking object could not be imagined, as he sat with his knees drawn up and his head bent dejectedly down. He did not notice the figure leaning eagerly over the bars, until she called him. Then he looked up with a start. The next instant he had dismounted and was standing bare-headed in the road before her. The moonlight made a halo of her white hair, and lighted up her gentle, aristocratic face with something of its old high-born beauty.

"I wanted to thank you," she said, holding out her slender hand to the painted little jester with the gracious dignity that had always been her charm. "You disappeared this afternoon before I could tell you how much your courtesy has done for me and mine."

He bowed low over the little hand.

"I bid you farewell, sir," she added gently. "The truest gentleman I have

met in many a day!" It was the recognition that he had craved. She had seen the man through the motley. He looked up, his face glowing as if that womanly recognition had knighted him; and with the remembrance of that touch resting on him like a royal accolade, he rode on after the procession, into the depths of the moonlighted forest.

The Fourth Traveler

Werley Snathers

By Way of an Inherited Circus

The Fourth Traveler

Wexley Snathers
By Way of an Inherited Circus

ONLY one question was asked in the streets of Gentryville that afternoon, and it was asked from the Court-house Square to the last corner grocery in the straggling outskirts:

"If *you* were an undertaker like Wexley Snathers, and had a circus left to you by will, what would you do with it?" When the question was worn threadbare in business circles, it was taken home to bandy around the village supper-tables, with the final insistent emphasis, "Well, what *would* you do, anyhow, if you were in Wex Snathers's place?"

It would have been an intense relief to the man in question if the village could have settled the problem for him. Noth-

ing had ever weighed so heavily upon him, not even the responsibilities of his first personally conducted funeral occasion.

All the afternoon he sat in the rear of his little coffin shop, floundering again and again through the confusing phrases of a legal document spread out before him. It notified him of the death of one Mortimer Napoleon Bennet, a travelling showman, who had left him heir to possessions valued at several thousands of dollars.

So bewildering was the unexpected news and the legal terms in which it was conveyed, that it was some time before Wexley's slow brain grasped the fact that the deceased was not a stranger, but only red-headed " Pole " Bennet, an old playfellow, who had run away from home over thirty years before. Next, his stumpy forefinger guided his spectacles

twice through the entire document before he realized that *he* was now the owner of all the ungodly goods and chattels enumerated therein.

"Lordy!" he groaned, as he checked off the various items. "Me, a deacon in the church, to be ownin' four gilded circus chariots and a steam calliope, to say nothin' of a trick elephant and a pair of dancin' cinnamon bears. It's downright scandalous! Pole always *was* a-gittin' me into hot water. *Meant* all right! Had a heart as big as a meetin' house, but he was at the bottom of every lickin' I ever got in my life. Mebbe not havin' any next of kin, he felt he sorter owed it to me to make me his heir."

Again his finger travelled slowly down the page to the clause in which three freaks connected with the side shows were especially commended to his care — an armless dwarf and the Wild Twins of

Borneo. The lawyer's letter explained that they had long been pensioners upon the bounty of the deceased, and had the promise of the dying man that "Wex" would be good to them.

"Bug the luck!" groaned the undertaker, as the full meaning of this clause also dawned upon him. "Guardeen to an armless dwarf and two wild twins of Borneo! Pole oughtn't to 'a' done me that way. I'll be the laughing stock of the town, and that'll ruin my chances for ever with Sade."

Glowering over his spectacles, he leaned through the open window and spat testily out into the cluttered back yard. It was some time before he drew in his shoulders. When a diffident old bachelor has obstinately courted a girl for a decade, he naturally falls into the habit of determining every act of his life by the effect it will have upon her.

In this case he could not imagine what effect his queer legacy would have upon Sade Cooper, the comely, capable spinster of his dreams. She had made up her mind to marry Wexley Snathers some day, for in the stout, sandy-whiskered little undertaker she recognized an honest soul of rare worth. On the occasion of his latest proposal, several weeks before, she had given him the reason for her repeated refusals: —

"I never could get along with your ma, Wexley. If you had enough to keep me in one house and old Mis' Snathers in another, I might think of marrying you. But she'd try to get me under her thumb, same as she's always held you, and your pa before you, and you know I never could stand that, so you might as well save your breath on that question."

Wexley realized the hopelessness of his suit, if that was what stood in the way,

and since Sade's outspoken confession he had almost prayed for an epidemic to smite the healthy little village, that the undertaking business might prove more lucrative.

Now, as he sat with his head out of the window, breathing in the sweetness of an old plum tree in bloom by the pump, he began to wonder if this unexpected legacy would not solve all his difficulties. If the circus could be made the stepping-stone for his desires without making him ridiculous, or offending Sade's Puritan conscience, then Pole would indeed have proved himself, for once, the greatest of benefactors.

The spring breeze bore to his senses the odour of the plum-blooms and the shouts of boys playing ball on the commons. "Poor old Pole!" he sighed, following the odour and the sound backward through nearly forty other springtimes,

to the first and only circus he had ever attended. He and Pole had run away to see it, in days when shows were forbidden ground. How vividly he remembered the whole glittering pageant, from the gaily caparisoned horses with their nodding red plumes, down through the gilded coaches, with mirror panels, to the last painted fool, riding backward on his donkey.

The sudden opening of the shop door rang a bell above his head. He started guiltily, jerking in his head in such haste that he struck it with a bang against the window sash. His first impulse was to sweep the papers on his desk out of sight, but as he recognized the voice of the genial drummer who kept him supplied with coffin plates and trimmings, he was overpowered by a longing to unburden his soul. So strong was the desire that he yielded to it incontinently, and leaning

over the counter and fixing his anxious little eyes on the drummer he almost whispered: —

"Between you and me and the gate-post, Bailey, what would *you* do if you had a circus left you by will?"

The drummer's laugh at what he supposed was intended for a joke was checked in the middle by the tragic earnestness of the questioner, who with a wiggle of his thumb beckoned him mysteriously to inspect the legal papers.

"There!" said he, "set down and give me your advice."

Seeing that the time for selling coffin-plates was not yet come, Bailey gave his attention to discovering on which side Snathers preferred the advice to fall, and being as voluble in giving advice as in the selling of goods, it was not long before he had nearly convinced his customer that, as a side-line to the undertaking

business, there was nothing on earth so desirable as a circus. "Sell it?" he exclaimed in conclusion, "Not by a jugful! It will make your fortune, Snathers, sure."

"But it will make talk," protested Wex, going back to his first argument with the provoking tenacity of slow minds. "I'm afraid it will hurt the undertaking, for there'll be them as will say they wouldn't have a showman performin' the last solemn rites for them, an' there'll be others to say a man has no right to carry on a business that's a stumblin' block and an offence." He was thinking of Sade.

"Oh, that doesn't cut any ice," answered the drummer, cheerfully, as he closed the door behind him. "Go in and win!"

The news travelled fast and before dark Wex had been advised to sell his

circus, to run it on shares, to have the animals killed and stuffed as a nucleus for a village museum. He was assured of success, warned of ignominious failure, congratulated on his luck and condoled with for the burden laid upon him. He was admonished that it was his Christian duty to refuse the legacy, and told by his next visitor that he would be a darn fool if he did.

He had aged visibly when he reached home, where he knew the news had preceded him by the voice of his mother in the kitchen, high and shrill above the sputter of the frying fat. She stood, hawk-eyed and hawk-nosed, fork in hand, talking to some one in the back door.

"Well," she was saying, decidedly, "there was never a Snathers yit, far as I know, that even went to a circus, and no son of mine shall own one if I have *my* say."

The answering voice was as decided as her own, provokingly cool and deliberate, but the sweetest of all sounds to the anxious eavesdropper. He flushed to the roots of his sandy hair and clutched nervously at his stubby beard. It was Sade's voice. She had heard the news and had run in the back way, in neighbourly village fashion, to ask if it were really true. He waited breathlessly for her answer: —

" And *I* think Wex'd feel he was flying straight into the face of Providence not to make all he could out of it, even if he had to run it himself for awhile." Then, startled by the sneeze that betrayed Wexley's presence, she said good-bye so hurriedly that he had only a glimpse of a white sunbonnet, fluttering around the corner.

Armed with this sanction, Wexley called that evening at the Cooper cottage,

where Sade kept house for a decrepit great-aunt. But she had heard wild rumours in the meantime — the possibility of his adopting the armless dwarf and the wild twins of Borneo, in case the show business did not pay. But on being anxiously assured that there was nothing whatever to fear in that direction if she would only marry him, she confessed that she did not approve of his running a circus any more than his mother did. It was only her chronic disability to agree with old Mis' Snathers that made her say it.

So it was with a sorely troubled heart and brain that Wexley took up the burden of life again next day. He had a funeral to conduct at ten o'clock, and he began it in such an absent-minded way that he might have made scandalous mistakes, had not the officiating clergyman's text — Jeremiah, xii: 9, — delivered in a high, nasal drawl, brought him to a sud-

den decision: "Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird. The birds round about are against her." "Yes, even Sade!" he thought. And such is the perversity of human nature that it stirred him to espouse the cause of his speckled bird. As he led the slow procession out to the cemetery, something followed him other than the hearse and the long line of carriages; — in that shadowy procession of fancy, black hearse-plumes gave place to the nod, nodding of red-plumed chariot horses. If there was anything Wexley Snathers particularly prided himself upon, it was the effective arrangement of funeral processions, and at the tempting thought of the scope for his genius circus parades would afford, the battle with his conscience was won. All the past called out loudly not to venture on any road where Pole Bennet's feet had left a track, but three days later — hoping

that old Mr. Hill would hold on to life until his return — the troubled undertaker locked the door of his little coffin shop and fared forth to claim his heritage.

It is not often that a dying man leaves his earthly affairs so thoroughly provided for as did Napoleon Bennet, yet that astute showman reckoned without an important element of his problem when he thought to put the armless dwarf in his old playfellow's care. He had not counted on the twist in her little warped brain, — a superstitious dread that amounted almost to mania. She was afraid of undertakers or anything connected with their gruesome business. A cold terror seized her when she learned she was about to fall into the hands of a man on intimate terms with Death and his pale horse and, with the cunning of

her kind, she began laying plans that would work his undoing.

Wexley first saw her sitting on a table, practising her one accomplishment, writing her autograph with her toes. "Be thankful for your arms. Jane Hutchins," she penned in round, childish script.

"Blest if it ain't better than I could do myself with both hands," declared Wexley, admiringly. Then, remembering what Pole had promised about his being good to the tiny creature, he patted her kindly on the head. She drew back with an inarticulate cry of alarm, turning upon him the face of a woman of thirty. A wild look of aversion gleamed in her little beady eyes.

It was the man's turn to draw back perplexed. He was beginning to feel like a fish out of water — powerless to cope with the emergencies of the show business. His employees had not been

long in taking his measure. The fat lady, the living skeleton and the leading clown, after looking him over, decamped to accept the offer of a rival showman. "He's too soft a snap for *me* to leave!" said one of the acrobats. "Why, that old skull-and-cross-bones doesn't know any more about this business than a white kitten. Didn't even know he'd have to get a license to show, or the whole lay-out would be attached."

Wexley, overhearing the conversation, grew weak in the knees. He was rapidly becoming disillusioned. He had been disappointed in the street parade. All the remembered glamour was lacking. It looked tawdry and silly to his mature eyes, and he was ashamed to be seen with it. He had just learned that the wild twins had never seen Borneo, but were only tattooed half-witted orphans whom Pole had picked up, and were not

even brothers. He was puzzled to know how he had incurred the uncanny little dwarf's displeasure, but he would have been still more puzzled could he have heard her whispering hoarsely to the twins of Borneo, as she held their frightened eyes fixed on hers in a fascinated gaze: —

"Remember, you promised to do it tonight. You know how to unlock the cages. He's a graveyard man, and if you don't let the lion eat him up, he'll put you in a box and screw the cover down." Here her voice sank to a series of husky, terrifying groans. "He'll — bury — you! In — a — deep — black — hole! And you'll *never — get — out!*"

Before dark Wexley had called on Pole's lawyer. "Advertise it for sale at half-price," he said. "I'm plumb disgusted, and want to get home. If tonight's performance hadn't been adver-

tised so big, I wouldn't risk tryin' to give it. I'm dead sure it'll be a failure."

Of that evening's performance, all that he could subsequently relate was this: "The calliope was playin', and everybody was clappin' and cheerin', and I was wavin' my old hat and cheerin' too, so pleased that the performance was turning out a success, when that old elephant, Lulu, stopped short in the ring and began to trumpet. That sorter paralyzed me. I felt in my bones that something was wrong. Then the smoke began to pour in, and somebody yelled the lion was loose. Then everything seemed to go wild. There was shoutin' and yellin' and an awful stampede. In the mix-up I got a twisted ankle, and somebody stepped on my head. That's the last thing I knew till morning."

In the morning he was lying on a hos-

pital cot, his head bandaged and his ankle in a plaster cast. Sam McCarthy, the lion tamer, his arm in a sling, had come to inquire about him.

"Well, we found out how it happened," he told Wexley. "It was Jane's doings — the little minx actually boasted of it. She struck matches with her toes and set fire to the straw in a dozen places. How those gibbering Borneo idiots ever let the lion out is more than *I* know, but they're strong as wildcats at times. She says she made 'em do it; — never could have happened in Bennet's time."

"I know," replied Wex, wearily. "I s'pose it was my fault that everything was left at loose ends, but it was all so confusin'. They didn't save much out of the wreck, did they?"

"No; we were too far out for the volunteer engine company to get there in time. Old Lulu's left, and the calliope.

They got that out, and the dancing bears and the horses. But such things as coaches, clothes, and fol-de-rols are done for, — and several people who were hurt are going to bring suit."

The undertaker closed his eyes and groaned. "And no insurance. All Gentryville would have to die off before I could raise money enough to pull me out now," he murmured. "I might have known that, living or dead, Pole would get me into trouble! McCarthy!" he exclaimed, starting up, "I wish you'd send that lawyer down here to me. I want to get shut of the whole blamed business before sundown. It ought to be settled before I get any worse."

There was a crowd around the bulletin-board of the Gentryville *Chronicle,* bearing a paragraph from one of the big city dailies. People stopped to read, and

pushed on with shocked faces to tell their neighbours that Wexley Snathers, trying to stop the stampede at the burning of his circus, had been fatally trampled and had since died in the hospital from internal injuries.

Old Mrs. Snathers sat in her darkened house, tense and wild-eyed, not knowing at what hour Wexley's mangled body might be laid before her. Sade refused to believe the report, until confronted with the staring headlines in which Wexley's name appeared in huge black letters. Then her remorse and self-reproach were almost more than she could endure.

It was towards night of the third day after the appearance of the bulletin that the train pulling into Gentryville bore among its passengers a tired-looking man on crutches. His head was bandaged,

and his gray linen duster bore marks of a long journey. Climbing down the steps farthest from the station, he swung himself along on his crutches toward the little coffin shop, and the smell of varnish that met him on entering was like the greeting of an old friend. Ignorant of the impression current about his death, he had gone first to the shop to get his bearings before meeting the eye and tongue of the village public.

Sitting beside the open back window, his first feeling was one of relief. The circus was a thing of the past. The lawyer had assured him that by some hook or crook, best known to his profession, he could undertake to settle all suits to the satisfaction of his client. He had also undertaken to consign the freaks to some public institution for the feeble-minded, and for his services he was willing to accept the very things that had grown to be

the bane of Wexley's existence, — the remnants of the circus.

Here he was at last, a free man, although with a sore head and a sprained ankle. The next thought was not so pleasant. He was farther from winning Sade than he had ever been before, by the whole amount of his doctors' bills and travelling expenses. Had it not been for his feeling that it was almost sacrilege to curse a dead man, he would then and there have anathematized Pole with a glad heart but with a vicious gnashing of teeth.

As he sat there in the deepening spring twilight, a tall comely figure came through the little gate at the side of his shop and started across his back yard. It was the short cut towards his home. He started forward eagerly as he recognized the familiar outlines in the dusk, and the slow sweep of skirts. He did not stop to

wonder why she should be going to his mother's just then. His only feeling was joy that his eyes rested upon her. It seemed years since he had seen her last. He knocked on the window-pane to attract her attention.

"Sade! Oh, Sade!" he cried, leaning out of the window, his linen duster gleaming ghostly gray in the twilight.

The startling apparition, looming thus suddenly out of the coffin shop, froze the woman's very soul. With a terrified cry she sank weakly in a heap on the ground, and sat there shivering and gibbering, tears of fright streaming down her cold face.

"Lord 'a' mercy, Sade! What's the matter?" he cried, stumbling over his crutches in his haste to unbolt the back door and get to her. As he attempted to raise her she fell limply against him, fainting.

"'Be thankful for your arms. Jane Hutchins.'" chuckled Wexley under his breath, as he realized that for the first time in his long wooing his arms were actually around her, and he half carried, half dragged her to the door-step.

Sade was not given to hysterics, but her fright at seeing what she supposed was Wexley's spirit, and the relief at finding him so very much in the flesh kept her sobbing and laughing alternately for some time. And the time was all too short for the man who listened to her tearful confession of remorse.

As he helped her to her feet he said solemnly: "I'll forgive Pole now for all the trouble he ever got me into. Since this circus affair has made you change your mind, it's the best job he ever did in his life."

Several days later he made the same remark to his mother. "Humph!" she

sniffed. "You hain't lived with her yit." Wexley whistled softly as he rubbed up his best sample coffin-plate, with which he intended to adorn the parlour wall, as is the fashion of Gentryville. He would hang it up on his wedding day, in grateful memory of his benefactor, with the name "Mortimer Napoleon Bennet" engraved upon it. At present it bore on its shining surface in large ornate letters only the inscription, "Rest in Peace."

The Fifth Traveler

Bap. Sloan
To His Mount of Pisgah

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THROUGH the twilight that filled the valley a winding white pike was all that could be seen distinctly. The brown-furrowed corn-fields were blotted out in the dusk. Farm-houses had merged their outlines into the dark mass of the surrounding trees. Only the apple-orchards kept their identity, and that because it was blossom-time, and the dewy night air was heavy with their sweetness.

Somewhat back from the pike, yet near enough for the rattle of passing wheels to give a sense of companionship, a man sat rocking back and forth in a narrow vine-inclosed porch. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and collarless, and the slow creak

of the old wooden chair seemed to voice his physical comfort like a purr; but it by no means expressed the state of his mind. That was attuned to something wholly melancholic, like the croaking of frogs in the pond below his house, or the far-away baying of a dismal-minded hound, which, tied behind some cabin across the clearing, was making the peaceful Sabbath evening vibrant with its misery.

"I can't help havin' a sort of fellow-feelin' for that dawg," muttered the man, raising his head to listen, and passing his hand slowly over the bald spot on his crown. "Must be considerable of a relief to let out and howl like that when you feel bad. There's been times when I wouldn't 'a' minded tryin' it myself for a spell."

Then he settled back into his chair with a long-drawn sigh. He was awaiting the

second ringing of the church bell. The first one had tolled its summons through the valley nearly an hour before, and vehicles were beginning to rattle along the pike toward evening service. The little frame meeting-house, known as the Upper Beargrass Church, stood in a grove of cedars just beyond Baptist Sloan's potato-field. It was near enough for any one sitting on his porch to hear the preacher's voice all through the sermon, and sometimes when he waxed eloquent at the close, in a series of shouted exhortations, even the words were distinctly audible.

But never in all the years of his remembrance had Baptist Sloan listened to the services of the sanctuary from his door-step. On the few occasions that illness had kept him at home, pain and multitudinous bedclothes had shut out all sound of song or sermon; and at other

times he was the most punctual attendant of all the congregation, not excepting even the sexton. People wondered why this was so, for he was pointed out as the black sheep of the flock, a man little better than an infidel, and belonging to that stiff-necked and proud generation which merits the anathemas of all right-minded people.

That he was a riddle which Upper Beargrass Church had been trying vainly to read for thirty years was a fact well known to the reprobate himself; for he had been openly preached at from the pulpit, laboured with in private, and many a time made the subject of special prayer. So, as he sat on the porch in the dark, with only the croaking of the frogs and the distant baying of the hound to break the stillness, it was with no surprise whatever that he heard his own name spoken by some one driving up the pike.

He could not see the horse that plodded along at a tortoise-like gait, or the old carryall that sagged and creaked with the weight of two big men on the front seat and a woman and three children on the back; but he recognized the voice as that of Mrs. Jane Bowles. Thin and strident, it stabbed the stillness like the rasping shrill of a katydid. She was leaning forward to speak to the visiting minister on the front seat.

"We're coming to Bap Sloan's house now, Brother Hubbs," she called in high staccato. "I want you should rub it into him good to-night in your sermon. He's a regular wolf in sheep's clothing, if ever there was one. Twice on a Sunday, for fifty-two weeks in the year, he's sitting in that third pew from the front, as pious as any pillar in the congregation. You can count up for yourself how many sermons he must have heard, for he's fifty,

if he's a day. But in spite of all that anybody can say or *do*, he won't be immersed and join. He's held out against everything and everybody till he's gospel-hardened. I ain't saying he doesn't put into the collection-box regular, or that he ain't a moral man outwardly; but that outward show of goodness only makes his example worse for the young folks. I never can look at him without saying to myself, 'But inwardly ye are ravening wolves.'"

The old horse had crawled along almost to the gate by this time, but Sister Bowles, not being able to see any one on the porch, went on, serenely unaware of being overheard.

"And there's Luella Clark that he's courted off and on for twenty years. It makes me real mad when I think of the good offers she's had and let slip account of him. She *couldn't* marry him, being

close communion, and not tolerating the idea of being 'unequally yoked together with unbelievers.' 'Twouldn't 'a' been right; and yet, somehow, she didn't seem to be quite able to give him up, when that was the only thing lacking. He'd make a good husband, for there never was a better brother lived than he was to his sister Sarah. She kept house for him till the day of her death. They say that last winter, when she lay there a-dying, she told him she couldn't go easy till she saw him immersed; but all he'd say was, 'Oh, don't ask me! I can't *now*, Sarah. Some day I will, but not *now*.'"

Here the preacher's voice broke in like the deep roll of a bass drum. "Has this — ah — young woman any idea of what — ah — produces such a state of — ah — obstinacy in the brother's mind?"

"Not an i-*dee!*" was the reply, jolted out shrilly as the carryall struck a stone.

"Not one good reason could he give Luella for putting off attending to his soul's salvation and trifling away his day of grace. Not one good reason, even to get her to marry him. But I think Luella is getting tired of dangling along. The other day I heard her joking about that little bald spot that's beginning to show on his head, and I noticed that Mr. Sam Carter's buggy has been hitched at their gate several times when I've happened to be passing. He's a widower, and you know, Brother Hubbs, that when widowers — "

The loud clanging of the church bell struck Sister Bowles's sentence in the middle, and the end of it was lost to the eager ears on the porch. Although this sound of the church bell was what Baptist Sloan had been waiting to hear for the last hour, he did not rise until the final echo of its ringing had died away

in the farthermost part of the valley. Then he went slowly into the house and lighted a lamp.

The open door into the kitchen revealed the table where he had eaten his dinner and supper without removing the soiled dishes. In every corner was the cheerless look that betrays the lack of a woman's presence. He had done his own housekeeping since his sister's death in the early winter. As he passed the table he gathered up a plateful of scraps which he had intended to give to the cat, but had forgotten, and carried it out to the back door-step. He tried to be mindful of the old creature's comfort for his sister's sake; but he was an absent-minded man, irresolute in nearly every action, and undecided in all things except the one for which the neighbourhood condemned him.

Just before he entered the house he had

almost made up his mind that he would not go to church that night. Sister Bowles's conversation had startled him with a new idea, and jogged him out of his well-worn rut. He would sit out on the porch till church was over, and then follow Luella home, and take up the thread of his protracted courtship where she had snapped it five years before.

But the habit of decades asserted itself. He bolted the back door, carried the lamp into the little bedroom adjoining the kitchen, and proceeded to brush his hair according to the usual Sunday-night programme of preparation. Sarah had always tied his cravat for him, and his stiff fingers fumbled awkwardly at the knot. That was one ceremony to which he could not grow accustomed, and he had serious thoughts of turning out a beard that would hide all sins both of

omission and commission in the way of neckties.

At last he was ready, but even with his hand on the knob and his hat on his head, he wavered again and turned back. Cautiously tiptoeing across the floor to see that the blue paper shade was drawn tightly over the one tiny window of the little bedroom, he opened the door into the closet, and felt around until his hand struck a nail that marked some secret hiding-place in the wall. From somewhere within its depths he drew out a little japanned canister, branded, in gilt letters, "Young Hyson;" but it was not tea that he emptied on the bed and poured through his rough hands, horny with long contact with hoe and plow. It was a stream of dollars and dimes and nickels, with an occasional gold piece filtering through like a disk of sunshine. A wad of paper money stuck in the canister until

he shook it. He counted that last, smoothing out the ragged bills one at a time, and then folding them inside a crisp new one so that its flaunting V was displayed on top.

One might have thought him a miser gloating over his gold, so carefully he counted it again and again, sitting there on the edge of his bed. But there was no miserly greed in the wistful glance that followed the last coin into the little canister, and it was with a discouraged sigh that he replaced the cover and sat looking at it, the slavish hoarding of years.

"It will take twenty dollars more," he finally whispered to himself; "and I can't depend on any ready cash until after wheat harvest." He counted slowly on his fingers May, June, July — it might be three months before he could get his threshing done, and three months, now that he was so near the goal of his life's

ambition, seemed longer than the years already passed in waiting.

They were singing in the church when he went out on the porch again, and as he did not want to go in late, that decided the question that had been see-sawing in his mind. He sat down in the rocking-chair, with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. Sister Bowles's conversation still rankled.

"O Lord," he groaned presently, "you know I'm not a wolf in sheep's clothing. More like I'm a sheep in a wolf's. Nobody understands it. Not even Luella. I want to tell her, and yet it seems like I hadn't ought to yet awhile. One minute I think one way and the next minute another. O Lord, I *vow* I don't know what to do!"

Then he caught the words of the song. It was not one of the usual hymns that floated out to him across the scent of the

apple-boughs, but an old tune that he had heard years ago at a camp-meeting:

"John went down to the river Jordan!
John went down to the river Jordan!
John went down to the river Jordan
To wash his sins away!"

Little did the congregation think, as they lifted their lusty voices, that with the thread of that old tune lay the unravelling of Bap Sloan's riddle. For this is the scene it brought back to him, out of one of the earliest years of his childhood. There was a white face lying back among the pillows of a great bed, with carved posts and a valance of flowered chintz that smelled faintly of lavender. Somebody had lifted the big family Bible and laid it open on the edge of the bed, and he saw himself, a sober-faced little fellow in brown dress and apron, standing on tiptoe to look at the pictures. That white

face on the pillows was his mother's, and this was the only recollection he had of her. Pointing to a queer old engraving, she had told him the story of John the Baptist, adding, with her thin hand on his curls: "And your name is John, too. Little John Baptist, though we don't call you by all of it. I named you that a purpose. Give you a good name, so 't you'd be a good man. Mebbe it's just a whim of mine, but I've thought a good deal about it while I've been lying here sick. Mebbe some day *you'll* be able to go to the Holy Land, 'way over the mountains and over the seas, and be baptized in that same river Jordan, where the dove descended. See the pretty dove?"

Even though the baby brain understood but dimly what she said to him, the light in her uplifted eyes filled him with solemn awe, and from that moment the mantle of her ambition rested henceforth

on his young shoulders. It was a vague, intangible thing at first, when he used to go back to the old Bible and study the picture in secret. He never understood when it began to fold itself about his life, or how it grew with his years till it completely enveloped him.

He was a man little given to introspection, and with a mind so slow to arrive at a conclusion that it always seemed doubtful if he would ever reach it. Still, when he once settled down on an opinion, his sister Sarah used to say it was with the determination of a snapping-turtle. "He wouldn't let go then till it thundered." His sister Sarah took charge of him, mind and body, when their mother died, and so thoroughly did she manage him that her will was always his, except in that one matter. He would not join the church of his fathers until he got ready, and he would give no reason for his delay.

He was twenty when he made his first stubborn stand against her, and for thirty years Sarah wept over him both in public and private, and for thirty years Luella Clark's heart battled with her conscience, which would not let her be "unequally yoked together with an unbeliever." And through all that time Baptist Sloan had kept his own counsel, hoarding every penny he could save, to the refrain of his mother's remembered words: "Over the mountains and over the seas, and be baptized in that same river Jordan, where the dove descended."

He had so firmly made up his mind that after that pilgrimage to his Mecca he would marry Luella that he had never viewed his conduct from her standpoint until Sister Bowles opened his eyes. Her speech about the widower aroused him to an undefined sense of danger. All that next hour his inclination shifted like a

weather-vane, first to take Luella into his confidence, then not to. By the time the congregation rose for the last hymn he had made up his mind.

The moon was coming up now, a faint, misty light struggling through the clouds. He waited until most of the congregation had passed his gate, and then striking out across the potato-field, waited at the turn of the road on the other side of the cedar-grove. It was here that Luella always parted company with the Robinson girls, and went the remaining way alone. It was only a few steps farther to her mother's brown cottage, and he hurried to overtake her before she should reach the gate.

"Land o' Goshen! Bap Sloan!" she exclaimed, with a startled little cry, as he came puffing along by her side. "Who'd 'a' dreamed of seeing *you* here? Why wa'n't you at church to-night? Every-

body was asking if you were sick, it's been so long since you've missed."

"Stop a minute, Luella," he exclaimed, blocking her way by planting himself directly in her path. "I want to talk to you. I've made up my mind at last to tell you, and I want you to come back and sit down on the stile where nobody else can't hear it."

Led by curiosity as much as by the new masterfulness in his tone, Luella turned back a step and seated herself on the stile that led into the apple-orchard. The blossom-laden bough of a gnarly old tree bent over her head and sent a gust of fragrance past her that made her close her eyes an instant and draw a long breath, it was so heavenly sweet. The night was warm, but she drew her shawl around her erect, angular figure with a forbidding air that made it hard for him to begin. "Well?" she said stiffly.

"I don't know just how it's goin' to strike you," he began, hesitating painfully. "That is — well, I don't know — maybe you won't take any interest in it, after all; but I kinder thought — something might happen in the meantime — maybe I'd better — "

He gave a nervous little cough, unable to find the words.

"What air you aiming at, anyhow, Baptist Sloan?" she demanded. "What's got your tongue? Mother'll wonder what's keeping me, so I wish you'd speak up and say what's on your mind, if there's anything a-troubling you."

Then he blurted out his confession in a few short sentences, and waited. She sat staring at him through such a long silence that he forced an uneasy laugh.

"I was afraid maybe you'd think it was foolish," he said dejectedly. "That's

why I never could bring myself to speak of it all these years. I thought nobody'd understand — that they'd laugh at me for spendin' a fortune that way. But honest, Luella, it is sort o' sacred to me, and mother's words come to me so often that it's grown to be like one of the commandments to me." His voice sank almost to a whisper: "'Over the mountains and over the seas, and be baptized in that same river Jordan, where the dove descended.' It's been no small matter to live up to, either. Sometimes it seems to me as if I'd been sent out like the children of Israel, and it was goin' to take the whole forty years of wanderin' to reach my promised land. I've spent thirty of 'em in the wilderness of wantin' *you,* but I begin to see my way clearin' up now toward the end. Only twenty dollars more! I can go after wheat harvest and the threshin'. Good Lord, Luella, why

don't you *say* somethin'! But it's no use; I know you think I'm such an awful fool."

She turned toward him in the dim moonlight, her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Bap," she cried, "to think how everybody has misjudged you all this time! It's perfectly *grand* of you, and I feel like a dawg when I remember all I've said about your not being a believer, when all the time you were better than any of us can ever hope to be. It's like being the martyrs and crusaders all at once, to stick to such an ambition through thick and thin. But oh, Bap, why *didn't* you tell me long ago!"

"Don't cry, Luella," he urged, awkwardly patting the shawl drawn around her thin shoulders. He was amazed and overwhelmed at this unprecedented revelation of tenderness in what had always

been to him the most stony-hearted of natures.

"Then maybe, Luella, after wheat harvest," he ventured, floundering out of an awkward pause, "after I've been and got back, then — will you have me?"

She slipped her hand into his. She would have had him then and there had he asked her, and counted it joy to be allowed to help toil for the funds still needed to carry her saint across the seas. Already she had fitted a halo about the bald spot she had lately ridiculed, and she burned to begin her expiation for that sacrilege.

But in the molding of his plans Baptist Sloan had arranged that marriage was to come after the Mecca, and in the hardening process of the years that idea had become so firmly set in his mind that nothing short of supernatural force could have

produced a change. It never occurred to him that it was possible to marry before he went on his pilgrimage.

He held the hand she had given him awkwardly. This was the hour he had dreamed of, but now that it had come, he was ill at ease, uncertain how to proceed. Suddenly a little breeze, swinging through the orchard, stirred the apple-bough above them, and sent a shower of pink-and-white blossoms across their faces. Velvety soft were the petals, cool with the night dew, and unspeakably sweet. She looked up at him, her face grown wonderfully young and fresh again in the moonlight. He stooped and kissed her. The apple-bough swayed again above them, with another fragrant shower of pink and white. It, too, was gnarly and old, but standing glorified, like them, for a little while in the sweetness of belated blossom-time.

It was the talk of the valley — this pilgrimage of Baptist Sloan's. Nobody within its borders had ever been out of sight of land, and the congregation divided itself into two factions regarding him. One division called it sinful pride that sent him chasing away to parts unknown on such an errand. Beargrass Creek was good enough for Bap Sloan's immersion, if it had been good enough for his father's and grandfather's before him. The other side agreed with Luella, according him the halo, and she, in the reflected light of such greatness, beamed proudly and importantly on all her little world.

Several weeks after this disclosure he stopped at the cottage one morning in great excitement. He held a letter in his hand, some railroad time-tables, and the itinerary of a "personally conducted" party to Palestine. "I say, Luella," he

cried, "look at this! It's clear providence that the Paris Exposition happened to start up just now. Here's a chance to go to the Jordan on excursion rates, with three days at the Exposition thrown in. I needn't wait till after wheat harvest now, it's so much cheaper than what I had figured on. And the beauty of it is, I can not only kill two birds with one stone, — take in Paris and Palestine both, — but have a guide to look after everything. It's been a mystery to me all along how I was to find my way around in those furrin parts by myself. But this settles everything. I can start to New York next Wednesday, and get there before the ship sails. *Lord*, Luella! To think it's really comin' to pass after all these years!"

Luella was in a quiver of excitement, but she rose to the occasion with almost motherly solicitude for his well-being.

"I'll put up your lunch, Bap," she said. "You needn't worry about a thing; only tell me what you'd like to have cooked. And if you've any clothes that need mending, just you bring 'em right down, and I'll see to 'em. I'll go over to your house after you've gone, too, and fix things ready to be left shut up for the time you're away."

Her prompt decision was so much like his sister Sarah's that he never thought of protesting. It seemed good to be managed once more, and he meekly acquiesced to all she proposed.

Luella had a sharp tongue, but it had lost its sting for him since she had put him on the pedestal of hero and saint. But it had not lost its cutting qualities when turned on other people.

"What's this big empty sarsaparilla bottle doing in your carpet-bag?" she de-

manded suddenly on the day of his departure.

"Old Mis' Bates wants that I should take it along and fill it at the Jordan. She's countin' on havin' all the family baptized out of it when I get back."

"Out of one quart bottle!" sniffed Luella, scornfully. "Humph! Just like the Bateses. Much good any one of 'em will get out of such a stingy sprinkling. Why didn't you tell her you couldn't be bothered with it? You always was the kind to be imposed on, Bap Sloan. If I wasn't so afraid of water that horses couldn't pull me on to a ship, I'd go along to look after you. *Do* take care of yourself!"

And that was the chorus shouted after him as he swung himself up the car-steps, stumbling over his carpet-bag and big cotton umbrella. Fully two thirds of the congregation were down at the station to

bid him good-bye. In the midst of the general hand-shaking some one started a hymn, and the last words that Bap Sloan heard, as he hung out of the train window to wave his hat, were:

"By the grace of God we'll meet you
On Jordan's happy shore!"

There was one last look at Luella, wildly waving a limp wet handkerchief. The sight so affected him that he had to draw out his bandana and violently blow his nose; but he smiled as the train went leaping down the track. All the weary waiting was over at last, and his face was set toward his Promised Land.

Several days later, in one of the south-bound trains pulling out of New York, the conductor noticed a man sitting with his head bowed in his hands. His soft slouch-hat was pulled over his eyes, and

an antiquated carpet-bag and big cotton umbrella were piled on the seat beside him. Except when he showed his ticket, there was no change in his attitude. Mile after mile he rode, never lifting his head, the hopeless droop of his bowed shoulders seeming to suggest that some burden had been laid upon them too great for a mortal to bear.

Night came, and he slept at intervals. Then his head fell back against the cushion of the seat, and one could see how haggard and worn was the face heretofore hidden. In the gray light of the early morning the conductor passed again and turned to give a second glance at the furrowed face with its unshaven chin, unconsciously dropped, and the gray, uncombed hair straggling over the forehead. Even in sleep it wore an expression of abject hopelessness, and looked ten years older than when, only three

days before, it smiled good-bye to the singing crowd at Beargrass Valley station. Baptist Sloan was homeward bound, and yet he had not so much as even seen the ship which was to have carried him to his Jordan.

It was only the repetition of an old story — old as the road going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He had fallen among thieves. In the bewilderment and daze which fell upon him when he found himself alone in a great city, he had been easy prey for confidence men. There had been a pretended arrest. He had been taken into custody by a man who showed his badge and assumed to be a private detective. Sure that he could prove his innocence, and smiling grimly as he compared himself once more to a harmless sheep in wolf's clothing, he allowed himself, without an outcry, to be bundled into a carriage that was to take him to the po-

lice station. When he came to himself it was morning, and he was on the steps of a cellar, with every pocket empty. He had been robbed of his little fortune, stripped bare of his lifelong hope.

How he was at last started homeward with a ticket in his hand could have been explained by a young newspaper reporter who interviewed him exhaustively at the police station, whither he finally found his way. The reporter made a good story of it, touching up its homely romance with effective sketching; and then because he had come from the same State as Baptist Sloan, because he had once lived on a farm and knew an honest man when he saw one, he loaned him the money that was to take this disabled knight errant home with his mortal wound.

It was on the afternoon of the second day that Baptist Sloan opened his old

carpet-bag for the remnants of the lunch that Luella had packed inside. His hand struck against Mrs. Bates's sarsaparilla bottle, and he shut his eyes with a sickening sensation of inward sinking.

"And I've got to take that there thing back to her *empty*," he said, gritting his teeth. "Where am I ever goin' to get the spunk to face 'em all? They'll say it was a judgment on me, for a good many of 'em seemed to think that I was too proud to be baptized in Beargrass. They'll say that maybe it's to save me from fallin' short of heaven that I failed to reach the Jordan."

As he slowly munched the dry remains of his lunch, the cogs of the car-wheels started anew the question that had tormented him all the way. "What *will*-Lu-*el*-la *say?* What *will*-Lu-*el*-la *say?*" they shrieked over and over.

"She'll say that I'm an awful fool,"

he told himself. "She never could abide to be laughed at, and if people poke fun at me, she'll never have me in the world." The alternate hope and despair that seized him were like the deadly burning and chill of fever and ague. "If I only knew how *she'd* take it!" was his inward cry. When he thought of her proverbial sharp tongue he quailed at the ordeal of meeting her. But through every interval of doubt came the fragrance of the moonlighted apple-orchard, the old stile, that one kiss — a remembrance as sweet as the blossom-time itself. Surely Luella must think of that.

Presently he noticed that the brakeman was calling out the names of familiar stations, and he realized that he was almost home. Only a few minutes more to summon his courage and brace himself for his trial. The train rumbled over a trestle, and peering out through the gather-

ing dusk he saw the shallow waters of Beargrass Creek, black with the reflection of the evening shadows. "The only Jordan Bap Sloan will ever see now," he said, with a shiver that sent a tremor through his bowed shoulders.

"Beargrass Valley!" he heard the brakeman call. Nervously he clutched his carpet-bag and umbrella, and lurched down the aisle. But when the train stopped and he was half-way down the steps, he paused and clung an instant to the railing. "O Lord!" he groaned once more, involuntarily shrinking back. "If women wa'n't so awfully oncertain! If I just *knew* what Luella's goin' to say!"

As Baptist Sloan clicked the latch of his front gate behind him, and stood a moment in the path, the familiar outlines of his old home rising up in the dim light smote him with fresh pain. The thirty years of hope and struggle were there to

meet him with accusing faces and to turn his home-coming into bitterness unspeakable — such bitterness as only those can know who have cringed under the slow heartbreak of utter failure. He did not even unlock the door, but dropping his carpet-bag and umbrella on the porch floor, sank down into the old wooden rocker, covering his face with his hands.

It was in this attitude that Luella found him an hour later, when she came hurrying down the path with quick, fluttering steps. The moonlight, struggling through the vines on the porch, showed her the object of her search.

"I just now heard you was home!" she cried, with a nervous little laugh. "It was in the evening paper, all about it. The doctor stopped by and showed it to me."

She paused on the top step, out of breath, and awed by the rigid despair

showing in every line of the silent figure. She had divined that he might need comfort, but she was not prepared for such desolation as this. Silently she took another step toward him, then another, and laid her hand timidly on his shoulder. His only response was a long, shivering sigh.

"Oh, Bap, *don't!*" she cried. "Don't take it like *that!*"

"I've give' up," he said dully. "Seems as if it wa'n't worth while to go on living any longer, when I've made such an awful failure. It's the hope of a lifetime blasted, and I can't help feelin' that some way or 'nother mother knows it, too, and is disappointed in me."

She gathered the bowed head in her arms, and pressing it toward her, began stroking it with soothing touches, as tenderly as if she had been that disappointed mother.

"There, there!" she sobbed, with a choking voice. "You sha'n't say that again. The world might count it a failure, same as they would a race-horse that didn't get under the wire first. But what if you didn't get there, Bap, *think how you ran!* You went just as far as the Lord let you, and nobody can count it a failure when He stepped in and stopped you. Look at Moses! He didn't get to his Promised Land either. Maybe it ain't right for me to make Bible comparisons, but you went just as far as he did, where you could stand and look over, and I'm proud of you *for* it. It's a sight farther than most people get."

There was tender silence for a little space, then she descended from the Pisgah on which she had placed him and came down to the concerns of every-day life. When she spoke again it was with her usual bustling air of authority.

"Here, I've brought the key," she said. "Stick your carpet-bag inside the door, and come home with me. Jordan or no Jordan, you've got to have a cup of tea and a good hot supper."

THE END.

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